The Honourable Artillery Company in World War II

REGIMENTAL FIRE

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GRI VI
THE AFRICA STAR
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THE ITALY STAR

Brigadier R·F·Johnson

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REGIMENTAL FIRE!

The Honourable Artillery Company
in World War II
1939–1945

The origin of the Company's custom of according "Regimental Fire!" instead of "Three cheers!" is explained in the Glossary

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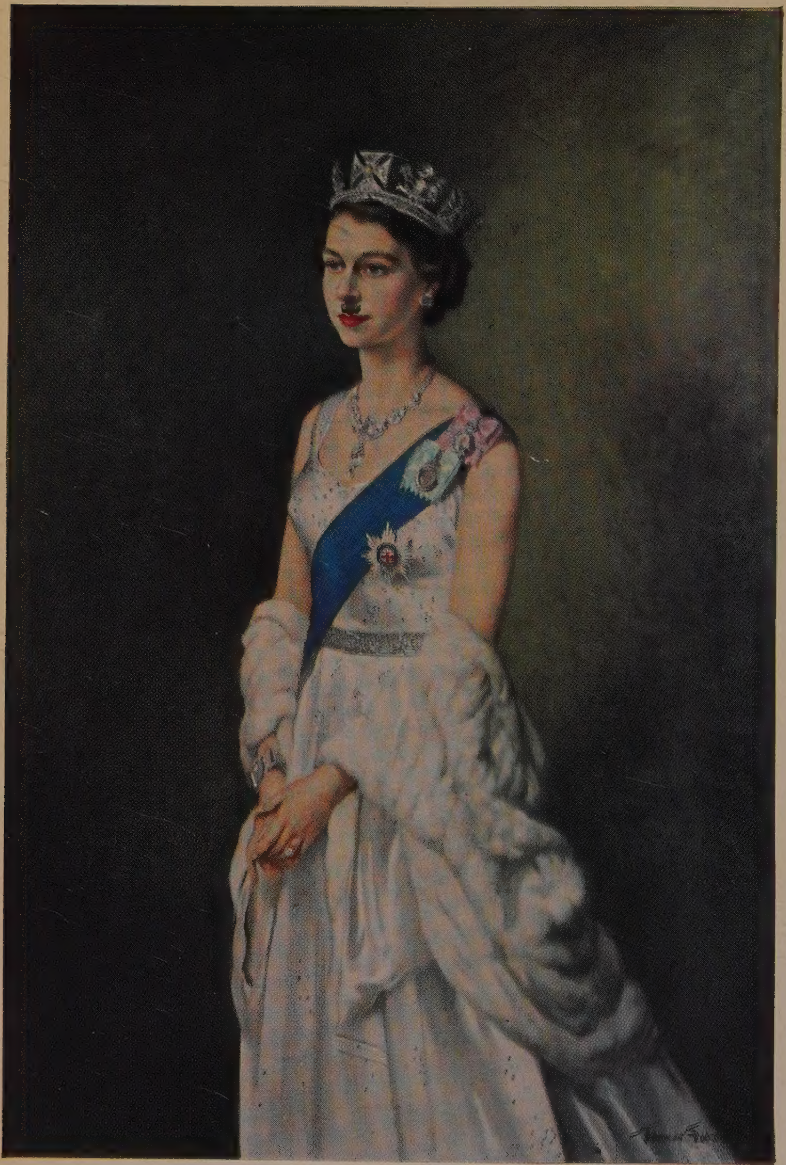

Painted by James Gunn

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN
CAPTAIN GENERAL, HONOURABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY

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REGIMENTAL FIRE!

The Honourable Artillery Company
in World War II
1939–1945

by

BRIGADIER R. F. JOHNSON (Retd.)
late Royal Army Ordnance Corps
(4 Company 1908–1915)

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to

Her Majesty the QUEEN

Captain General

Honourable Artillery Company

with the Author's humble duty

FOREWORD

by

MAJOR GENERAL SIR JULIAN GASCOIGNE, K.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O.

COLONEL COMMANDANT OF THE HONOURABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY

"Regimental Fire!" is the remarkable story of the Honourable Artillery Company in World War II; remarkable because no other Regiment's members served as Infantry, Royal Horse Artillery, Heavy Anti-aircraft Artillery, National Defence Companies, Special Constabulary, and officers of their own cadet battalion.

It is a story which illustrates the true meaning of tradition; that indefinable something which not only enables the soldier to face death in battle, but also to carry on month after month and year after year doing to his utmost the uncongenial, the unromantic and the unwanted tasks of war.

This applies particularly to the Infantry Battalion, the oldest unit of the H.A.C. The War Office, mindful of the loss of potential officers incurred by the Battalion fighting as a unit in the First War, converted them on September 5th 1939 into an O.C.T.U. The part they played takes up less than three and a half pages of this book, but their true role appears in the second paragraph of the chapter entitled "H.A.C. Infantry—162 (H.A.C.) O.C.T.U." and in the Appendices.

It also applies to the National Defence Companies in the Docks, the Special Constabulary on their beats in the East End and the Cadets in the Artillery Garden. Their tasks were generally dull, often dangerous and demanded patience, fortitude and courage. These qualities were never wanting.

The greater part of the book is taken up by the more glamorous exploits of the rest of the Honourable Artillery Company.

We have the story of the 11th and 12th Regiments, parent and child. They go their separate ways, the 11th into action with the Jock Columns in January 1942 and then through all the battles of the Desert war. The 12th Regiment started their fighting career with the First Army in North Africa. In April 1942 the 11th Regiment was transferred from Eighth Army to the First Army, and parent and child fought the final battles in Tunisia side by side under command of the 6th Armoured Division. Their paths parted again; the 11th to be the first gunners ashore in Europe in Sicily, the 12th remaining in North Africa. After a short period close to each other in North Africa both regiments again went their separate ways to battle up the long peninsula of Italy, coming together again after victory, when the 11th Regiment absorbed the 12th, in preparation for the final dissolution of both at the end of 1945.

The 13th (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A., fathered by five officers and some three hundred and sixty other ranks posted from 12th Regiment, came into being in November 1940. This small drop of H.A.C. blood was sufficient to imbue the new unit with all the spirit and traditions of the Company. In their eleven months of fighting from June 1944—Caen was their first battle—until the end of the war in Europe, they earned three battle honours.

86 (H.A.C.) Heavy Anti-aircraft Regiment and 275 Battery, detached from the Regiment after two years, had careers well worthy of the H.A.C. After providing over eight hundred officers in the first year of the war, they fought in defence of this country against German aircraft until June 1944. In France and Germany they fought not only as Anti-aircraft artillery but also in the most unorthodox roles. Their story makes some of the most interesting reading in the whole book.

For more than a hundred years the Honourable Artillery Company and the Brigade of Guards have had a close association with each other—an association which is equally valued on both sides. The fortunes of war decreed that this should continue in World War II. In every theatre where formations of the Brigade of Guards were engaged, there were units of the Honourable Artillery Company. The words "in support of the Guards" run like a thread through the whole book. Reading "Regimental Fire!" makes me proud of the privilege of membership of both.

26th February 1958.

BATTLE HONOURS

North-West Europe 1944 - 45

Bourguebus Ridge	13 Regiment
Antwerp	13 Regiment
Le Havre	86 Regiment
The Rhine	13 Regiment

North Africa 1941 - 43

Knightsbridge	11 Regiment
El Alamein	11 Regiment
El Hamma	11 Regiment
Sbiba	12 Regiment
Thala	12 Regiment
Tunis	11 & 12 Regiments

Sicily 1943	11 Regiment

Italy 1944 - 45

Cassino II	12 Regiment
Coriano	11 Regiment
The Senio	12 Regiment

* The Battle Honours for inclusion on the Colours are printed in heavy type.

I would like to pay a compliment to the gunners, and I would like this to be passed on to every gunner.

The gunners have risen to great heights in this war; they have been well commanded and well handled. In my experience the artillery has never been so efficient as it is today; it is at the top of its form. For all this I offer you my warmest congratulations.

The contribution of the artillery to final victory in the German war has been immense. This will always be so; the harder the fighting and the longer the war, the more the infantry, and in fact all the arms, lean on the gunners. The proper use of the artillery is a great battle-winning factor.

I think all the other arms have done very well too. But the artillery has been terrific and I want to give due weight to its contribution to the victory in this campaign.

B. L. Montgomery
Field-Marshal
C-in-C
21 Army Group.

Germany
27-6-45

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PREFACE

IT need hardly be said that this history, compiled 12 years after the last incident which it records, owes little to the present writer. For virtually all of it, credit is due to the foresight and Regimental spirit of officers who, while engaged in these events, found time to chronicle them for the benefit of their comrades, past, present and future, of the Honourable Artillery Company.

In particular—if it is not invidious to name individual sources—it will be obvious how much this work owes to the history of 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. produced in 1945 by Lieut.-Colonel Kenneth Bolton (B Battery); the illuminating war diaries of Majors R. C. Croxton (E) and R. N. Smith (B); the brisk battle pictures contributed by Colonel G. R. Armstrong (A Battery) to the Royal Artillery Commemoration Book; and the narratives prepared by Lieut.-Colonel S. N. Rae (12 Regiment) and Lieut.-Colonel J. Bamford Smith (National Defence Companies).

Not least, the compiler is indebted to the groundwork of the late Major G. Goold Walker, Secretary and Historian of the H.A.C., whose felicitous craftsmanship would have produced, had he lived, a record more worthy of the Company.

On occasion this chronicle will be found to contain criticism of the higher conduct of battles and campaigns. The writer makes no pretence to personal qualification in this field, but has adopted the assessment of commentators of greater experience, proficiency and first-hand knowledge of the events. His object in so doing is not to revive long-standing controversies but to explain how, in certain actions, the gunners' gallantry and skill were denied the consummation they deserved.

One further point should be made clear. Many people whose gallant deeds are chronicled here are happily still among us, and still closely linked with the H.A.C. The writer has had to stipulate

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firmly, as is his duty and privilege, that no feelings of modesty or diffidence on their part shall prevent his presenting their exploits as, in the documents at his disposal, he found them.

R. F. J.

Note.—Some doubt appears to have existed in both official and unofficial circles as to the correct designation of H.A.C. units. 11 and 12 Regiments at no time bore titles other than 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. and 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. There appeared in the JOURNAL, however, a reference to some "subtle distinction" by which the other two Regiments were designated 86 H.A.A. Regiment R.A. (H.A.C.) and 13 Regiment R.H.A. (H.A.C.). The writer has been unable to discover any justification for this distinction which, if it ever existed except as the typing error of some War Office clerk, was so "subtle" and pointless that no officer whom he has consulted could assign any reason for it or was even aware of it. Accordingly he has ignored it and set out the title of each H.A.C. unit in the form used by the senior Regiment.

The Appendices are based on the records maintained at Armoury House during the war period by Major Goold Walker and Major C. A. J. Whyte, both from official publications and from notifications received from individual Members. Every effort has been made to repair any omissions or rectify any errors that may have occurred; but it is realised that there may still be items which have not been completely or correctly notified to Headquarters.

GERMINATION

THE motto of the Honourable Artillery Company—*arma pacis fulcra*—has seldom commended itself to politicians or to the electorate on whose capricious favours they depend. Hence as each successive war begins the arbiters of the nation's destiny are obliged to call upon the Armed Forces, amateur and professional, not only for valour, which is their normal stock-in-trade, but for feats of improvisation which appear impossible when they are propounded and incredible when they have been achieved.

Thus during the first eight months of 1939, as it became daily more evident that a statesman's much advertised umbrella would provide insufficient shelter from the coming storm, the Artillery Division of the Honourable Artillery Company—then comprising a two-battery Regiment of Royal Horse Artillery—were called upon to expand into three Regiments. Ultimately four were evolved—14 batteries in all, 13 of which in due course served overseas.

Meanwhile the H.A.C., artillery and infantry alike, maintained an ever-increasing flow of officers to other arms. Long before H.A.C. units found themselves in the battle line, they had contributed an array of officers far exceeding their original total strength. When the Regiments themselves took the field only a handful remained of those officers and men who had mobilised with them; but the potency of this leaven was such that each successive battery, when their testing time came, maintained the traditions of the Regiment and enhanced its record.

The first unit engendered by the pre-war H.A.C. were formed in March 1939—86 (H.A.C.) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment Royal Artillery. At Armoury House the scenes of August 1914 were re-enacted, as throngs of volunteers—officers from the Regimental Reserve, veteran members, ex-members who had soldiered with the H.A.C. in the old war and the years of uneasy peace—converged on Headquarters to offer their services. Before the outbreak of war this hand-picked Regiment had taken their place in London's defences. By the time they came into action (they were the first H.A.C. unit to do so) they, too, had passed out of their ranks a generous quota of officers for other units.

Hard upon this development came the decision in May 1939 to duplicate the Territorial Army. The two pre-war batteries, A and B, with their Regimental Headquarters, became 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. (comprising A and B Batteries), their offspring being designated 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment (comprising C and D Batteries).

Further claims on the H.A.C.'s officers and specialists followed when R.H.A. regiments were brought up to a three-battery basis; 11 Regiment raising E Battery and 12 Regiment F Battery; and again when the order came for the formation of a third R.H.A. regiment. While themselves still in the formative stage, 12 Regiment sent a cadre of officers, N.C.O.s and men to help in moulding 13 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. into still another unit destined to embellish the Colours with fresh battle honours. Later rearrangements added two batteries, 383 and 446, to 86 H.A.A. Regiment.

Meanwhile the officer-producing classes which A and B Batteries had instituted, largely on their own initiative,[1]* throughout a series of annual camps, took formal shape at Aldershot, becoming 121 (H.A.C.) Officer Cadet Training Unit, under the command of Lieut.-Colonel A. H. Burne, D.S.O.

No offers of services, no remonstrances in high quarters, could secure for the Infantry Battalion the opportunity of reviving, as a unit, the laurels won in 1914-18. Resolutely, if regretfully, they shouldered the task of maintaining, under the title of 162 (H.A.C.) O.C.T.U., a school of arms whose pupils, serving in virtually every unit and branch of the Army and every theatre of war, earned for the H.A.C. abundant, if vicarious, honours.

H.A.C. Defence Companies were at their posts as war broke out, manning vital points in the London docks.

The H.A.C. Special Constabulary—the only unit of the Company manned exclusively, from first to last, by members of the H.A.C.—had begun their duties with Commercial Road Police Station as their base.

Still in the womb of time, the H.A.C. Cadet Battalion were destined to foster at Armoury House, for the last two years of war, the H.A.C. spirit which was proving itself on so many battle fronts.

---

* References will be found at the end of each chapter.

[1] This phase cannot be recorded without mention of the name of Lieut.-Colonel E. W. Goldsworthy, T.D., who commanded the Regiment from 1935 until 4 September 1940. It was mainly to his insistence that the H.A.C. Artillery Regiments owed their existence in a dual role—as fighting units and as officer producers.

11 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT R.H.A.

1. APPRENTICESHIP

September 1939—*December* 1941

ALTHOUGH 11 Regiment moved out of Armoury House as soon as war was declared, the day was far distant when they would function realistically as a unit. Chaos was to succeed chaos as half-trained gunners were whisked away to guard curiously chosen "vulnerable points" from vaguely defined perils. Hazards became more credible, danger areas more manifest, as the Regiment, scattered in detachments, took their share in manning the beaches while Britain, after Dunkirk, drew breath again.

It should be reckoned not least among the achievements of Lieut.-Colonel W. A. Ebbels, M.C., who took command of 11 Regiment in the summer of 1940; of his battery commanders, Major J. F. Adye (A), Major W. A. Sheil (B) and Major R. C. Croxton (E), and his Adjutant, Captain A. E. C. Green, that amid this chaos they pursued their way unswerving; so that in May 1941 the unit which moved from Gomshall, Surrey, into more appropriate terrain at Chilton Foliat had the semblance of a regiment of Royal Horse Artillery prepared for battle. Such was the verdict, a month later, of Brigadier C. M. Vallentin, commanding the Support Group of 1 Armoured Division.

Like the Highland Division, now being reconstituted far away to the North after the disaster of St. Valery,[1] 1 Armoured Division had a past to avenge and a future to fulfil. They had been flung in piecemeal when the fight for France was virtually over; had never fought as a formation. Incomplete and half-equipped to begin with, they had lost, in a few haphazard, gallant fights which were scraps rather than battles, a great part of their armament. Neither their units nor their Commander, Major-General Roger Evans, M.C. (who had begun his varied military career in the ranks of the H.A.C. Infantry), had ever had a chance.

Warmly the Division welcomed to their midst the Artillery arm which had been denied them in 1940. On 30 July 1941, when the King and Queen visited Chilton Foliat, they saw a Division ready, by all prevailing standards, to seize the laurels which had eluded them a year ago. After giving their Captain General a convincing display of their prowess—a "quick action" by C Troop, a tank shoot by B Battery—11 (H.A.C.) Regiment had the honour of offering their Majesties tea in the Mess, and they were photographed with the officers.

Cookhouse gossip saw, in the royal visit, a certain portent of early embarkation. Within a week the Regiment's entire equipment of tractor-drawn 25-pounders had been overhauled. Inoculations, making of wills, issue of tropical clothing with its inevitable concomitants of comic misfits and wild rumours, all the usual pre-embarkation routine followed: not forgetting the customary onset of matrimony.

There was a farewell ball at Chilton Lodge—and the inevitable outcrop of last-moment changes of personnel. A and B Batteries lost their O.C.s—both promoted to commands. Major J. R. E. ("Tishy") Benson joined, to command B Battery; Major J. McDermid, from Second-in-Command of the Regiment, took over A Battery, his place being filled by Major J. E. F. Linton.

The Duke of Gloucester, himself a member of the H.A.C., came down on 14 September to wish the Regiment God-speed.

By 26 September 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. were embarked on H.M. Transport *Samaria*, riding for a week in Mersey Channel while the convoy assembled which was to carry 2 Armoured Brigade and 1 Support Group to a destination heatedly discussed but not yet revealed.

The embarkation was not without incidents, several of which threw new light on the mentality of the Merseyside docker. Equipment, gathered with the utmost difficulty, was damaged by wantonly careless crane work. Cranemen, in the act of loading mess gear for 10 Hussars, let the load down with a crash when the whistle blew for work to cease, strewing the hold with broken crockery. There were threats of a strike from dockers who objected to officers and other ranks directing and helping in the storage of special items needed for training during the voyage.

Less sinister and more amusing was the arrival of Captain H. Bourne. He had been sent ashore on duty, and had arrived back on the quayside to see the gap between ship and quay widened to a distance no gangway could bridge. Was he to be left behind while his comrades sailed to war? By no means! Impassioned pleadings in the dock office secured a tender in which he raced to the ship's side. The subsequent seven-day wait within a few cablelengths of the shore provided a classic case of anti-climax.

Escorted by the cruiser *Devonshire*, sundry destroyers and, later, the aircraft-carrier *Argus*, the transport fleet completed without warlike incident its zig-zag journey, via Freetown, Durban and Aden, to Port Tewfik.

The time-honoured tomfoolery of crossing the Line; the prodigious hospitality of Durban remain in the memory. So, too, do the sweltering discomfort of the overcrowded mess decks, blacked out and airless; the shortage of fresh water; the monotonous calling of the "Housie-housie" schools.

For some, however, the voyage's outstanding recollection was a brief visit to the memorial at Aden where, in an almost forgotten two-months' campaign marked with every extremity of discomfort, the forerunners of B Battery first came into action in the 1914-18 war. Towards Aden, too, the Regiment lined the deck in formal farewell to the battle-cruiser *Repulse*, which had joined their escorts at Cape Town and was now steaming away towards her last battle in the Eastern seas.

NOTE TO CHAPTER ONE

12 June 1940.

2. INITIATION

December 1941—*January* 1942

Disagreeable surprises awaited the Regiment from the moment of their disembarkation on 6 December 1941. Those who, guessing rightly their destination, had studied in books the climate of Egypt had learned, no doubt, that the fifty-day sandstorm, the *khamsin*, blew up at pretty regular intervals between March and May. Instead, it greeted them in December—a fierce bitter wind laden with stinging, blinding sand. Far worse was the realisation that their main equipment, their brand new guns, vehicles and stores, on whose efficiency and readiness such labour and care had been expended, had gone astray.

There are difficulties, which those concerned with military transport appreciate more fully than their critics, in shipping a formation ten thousand strong, with their armament, their thousands of vehicles, their vast tonnage of stores, so that each unit's quota will arrive simultaneously with the unit, after a voyage, not unattended with peril, of eleven thousand miles. Difficulties there are. Let it suffice to say that the authorities concerned made the most of them.

Within a few hours of arrival the personnel of 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment had been despatched by train to Amyria, a small village on the desert fringe, some 25 miles from Alexandria. There the Regiment had their first sight of the waste land which was for 15 months to be their home and their battleground.

For 10 days they sorted, and furbished for war as best they could, a medley of guns and vehicles; some their own, some battered and war-worn; some from the quayside, others from the vast Ordnance depot at Tel-el-Kebir. The spares with which they had started, complete to the last split-pin, were vanished. With what they could scratch together the Regiment, working against time, made their vehicles desert-worthy. Guns were calibrated. Veterans wise in desert warfare lectured eager, if weary, audiences on leaguering, desert navigation and the thousand arts and crafts which, in the sandy seas, spell the difference between hardy efficiency and miserable discomfort.

On 15 December 1941, nine days after their disembarkation, 11 Regiment drove out, in a deluge of rain, to Mersa Matruh, 180 miles nearer the desert battle-line. Thence for another 500 miles they followed General Auchinleck's advancing Army, racing forward, each battery linking themselves more closely, in comradeship and co-operation, with the armoured regiment they had been detailed to support: A Battery with the Queen's Bays, B Battery with 10 Hussars, E Battery with 9 Lancers.

In their company they learned the routine of the Desert. Nothing they had practised in the leafy lanes of Surrey or the green downland of Berkshire had prepared them for these vast spaces where a single battery could—and, if enemy bombing raids were a likely risk, must—spread, when halted in open leaguer, over half a square mile: with vehicles 200 yards apart (for thus, with good luck, a stick of bombs might drop within the leaguer and cause neither casualties nor damage).

Now, on the code word "Handshake", the batteries learned also to take their place, in their respective regimental groups, in close leaguer, the mosaic formation worked out by long experience to secure, for the entire column, safety from surprise attack and the opportunity of orderly refit. Tanks of the armoured regiment, spaced five yards apart, formed the perimeter, their guns swung outwards; with machine-guns on fixed lines and Brens covering the angles. Four hundred yards from each corner listening posts lay out, wired to column headquarters. Within, the various units—Infantry company, Anti-Tank battery, Anti-Aircraft troop and H.A.C. battery—were spaced in columns fifteen yards apart. Thus there was room for replenishing vehicles to pass up and down refuelling and revictualling, saving the crews time and fatigue and reducing movement to the minimum.

Immediately leaguer was formed, the day-to-day (or rather night-to-night) administration could get into full swing. Sick and, later on, wounded would be attended to and, if necessary, evacuated by ambulance.

Nightly it became less of a miracle, more of a routine, for the pattern of vehicles to be formed; the web of telephone wires spread; slit trenches and latrines dug, bivouac shelters rigged, bully stew cooked and eaten, tea brewed, fires out and the unit ready to bed down, all within an hour; and soon an hour was reckoned too long.

Indeed, should it seem likely that a leaguer in process of formation had been spotted by enemy reconnaissance aircraft, the entire group could be moved three or four miles away, on a compass bearing, without confusion: or, on moonlit nights, expanded over a widely extended space.

As the column moved off at dawn, units' B Echelons stood fast, proceeding as a group to replenish at the R.A.S.C. meeting point, ready for the next night.

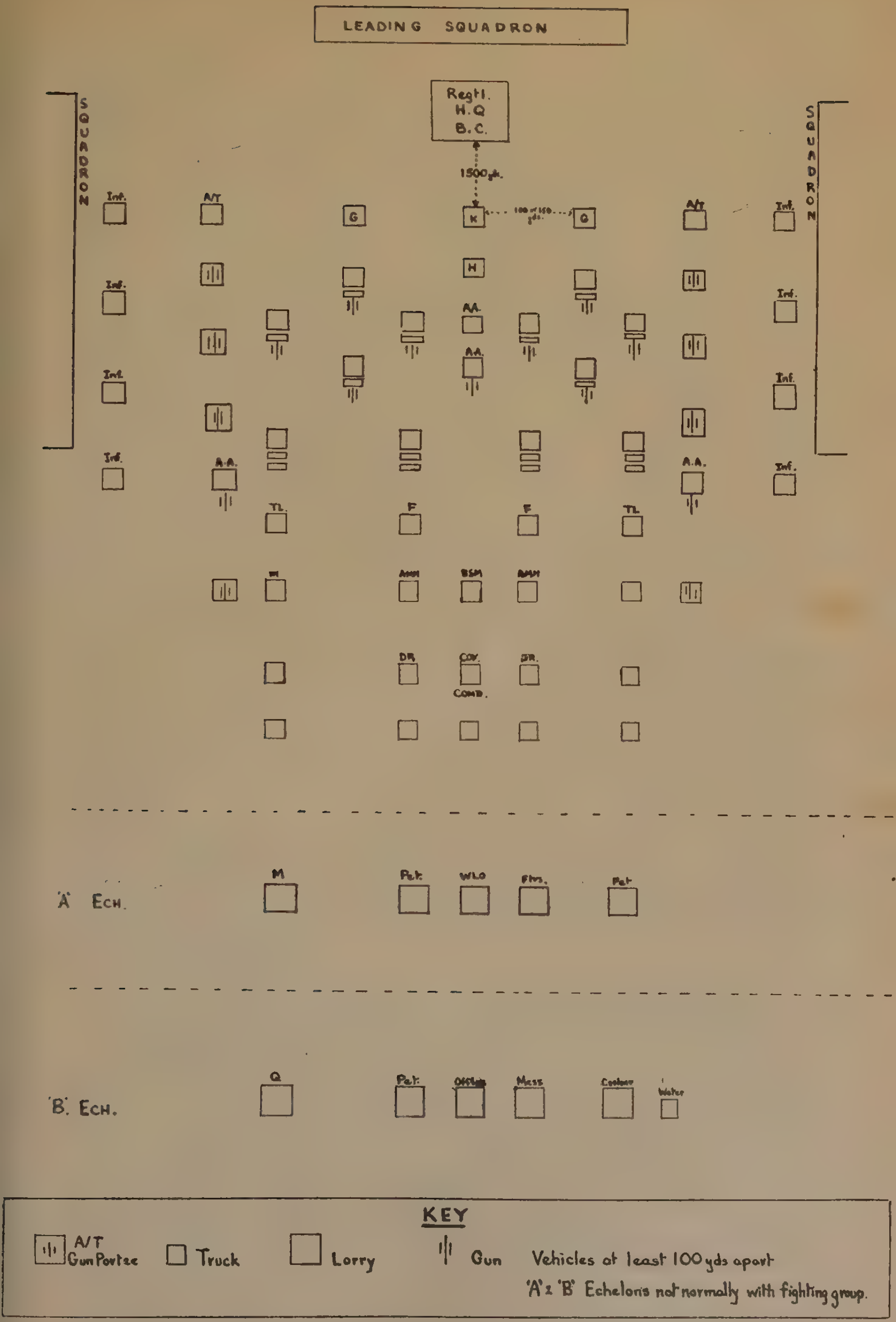
Should the commander of B Echelon, bringing up his vital supplies, have difficulty in finding the leaguer again, he would ask, by radio-telephone, for a "toffee apple". This meant that he would fire one or more rounds of tracer shot into the air. On these the leaguer would take a bearing, passing it by R/T to the echelon. Firing of Verey lights for direction-finding was not encouraged, owing to possible confusion with SOS signals—an inhibition not shared by the enemy, who in moments of stress was apt to light the landscape with showers of green illuminating flares.

It was a hard, hungry—and very thirsty—spell as the Regiment moved towards the battle line. Smokeless, too, for many. The busy, brief stay in the Delta had left little time for stocking up. Dried tea-leaves rolled in message forms became tolerable, enviable. Grumbles at such hardships—and grumbles, of course, there were—vanished in the day-time exhilaration of driving across the Desert, a regimental group in full cry.

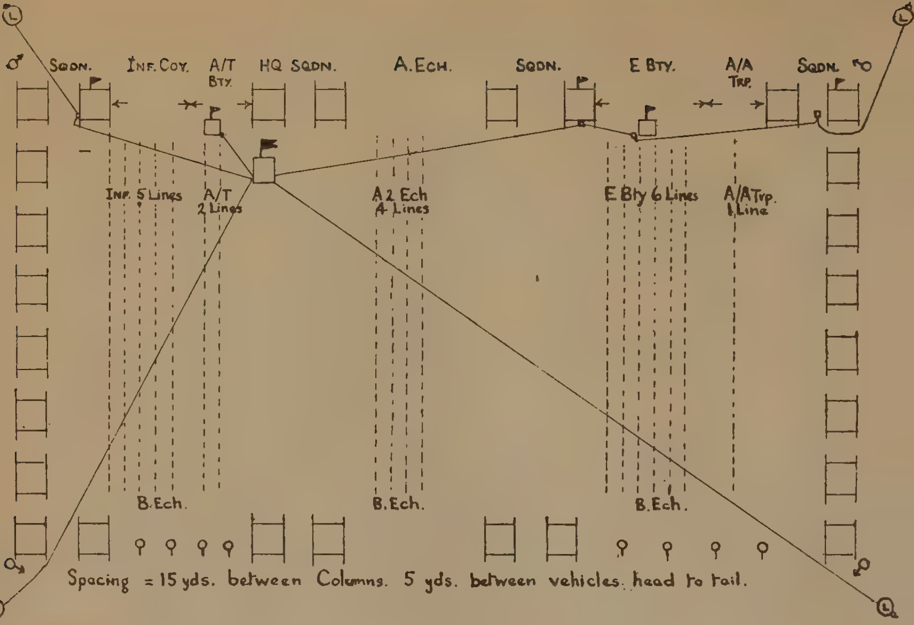
Ahead, a screen of carriers cruised across good going, when such it was, at twenty miles an hour. Three squadrons of the Armoured Regiment ranged themselves around the H.A.C. guns: one squadron, in line abreast, in front; the others, in line ahead, on either side; while motorised infantry and anti-tank guns completed the square.

Each vehicle crew was a messing unit, equipped with its own patent oven, its brew-can carried hooked under the tailboard, its own cooking gear and its own culinary standards, daily improving as ambition soared above the level of mere bully stew; as the daily ration of biscuits—one packet per man—took on such disguises as "biscuit burgoo" (smashed and served as porridge) or jam waffles (soaked in water and fried).

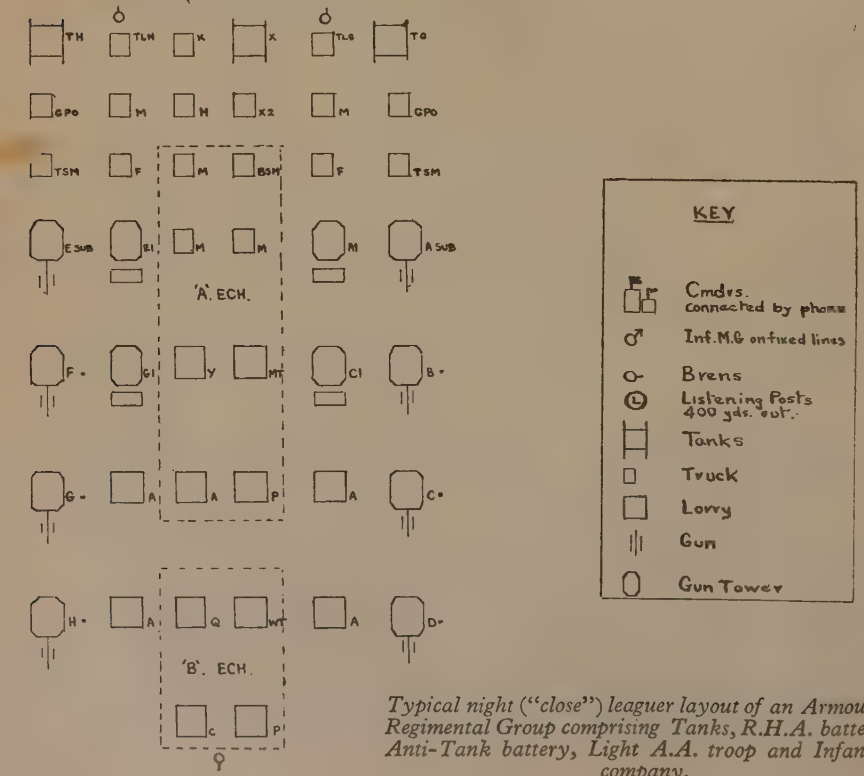
The fuel problem was solved in a manner which might have shocked folk at home, their cars garage-bound by petrol-rationing.


LEADING SQUADRON
Regtl. H.Q B.C.
1500 yds.
K
100 to 150 yds.
G
G
H
AA.
AA.
SQUADRON
SQUADRON
Inf.
A/T
A.A.
TL.
F
AMN
BSM
DR.
COY. COMD.
M
'A' ECH.
Pet.
WLO
Fitrs.
Q
'B' ECH.
Offrs
Mess
Canteen
Water
KEY
A/T Gun Portee
Truck
Lorry
Gun
Vehicles at least 100 yds apart
'A' & 'B' Echelons not normally with fighting group.

Typical pre-deployed battle formation of an Armoured Regimental Group comprising Tanks, R.H.A. battery, Anti-Tank battery, Light A.A. troop and Infantry company.


SQDN.
INF. COY.
A/T BTY.
HQ SQDN.
A. ECH.
SQDN.
E BTY.
A/A TRP.
SQDN.
INF. 5 Lines
A/T 2 Lines
A 2 Ech 4 Lines
E Bty 6 Lines
A/A Trp. 1 Line
B. Ech.
B. Ech.
B. Ech.
Spacing = 15 yds. between Columns. 5 yds. between vehicles. head to tail.

DETAIL OF E BATTERY LAYOUT


TH
TLM
K
X
TLG
TG
GPO
M
M
X2
M
GPO
TSM
F
M
BSM
F
TSM
E SUB
E1
M
M
M
A SUB
'A'. ECH.
F
G1
Y
MT
C1
B
G
A
A
P
A
C
H
A
Q
WT
A
D
'B'. ECH.
C
P
KEY
Cmdrs. connected by phone
Inf. M.G. on fixed lines
Brens
Listening Posts 400 yds. out.
Tanks
Truck
Lorry
Gun
Gun Tower

Typical night ("close") leaguer layout of an Armoured Regimental Group comprising Tanks, R.H.A. battery, Anti-Tank battery, Light A.A. troop and Infantry company.

Here and there crackling camel-thorn was to be had—leading the scripturally-minded to remark "As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity"[1] till the quotation lost its savour. Where the Desert was barren even of this sapless growth, petrol poured on the sand provided the usual fire.

Memories of home training gave way to admiring delight as, for the first time, the Regiment refuelled from a desert petrol dump. No longer would a range of petrol pumps, slow and inadequate, mark the head of an exasperated queue. Instead, they found four-gallon tins ranged in dozens of piles, to one of which each vehicle drove. A moment of silence as they halted and switched off: then the din of hammer and chisel on tin as the cans were punctured. No forms to fill; merely the name of the unit, given to a sunburnt, desertised R.A.S.C. corporal.

Not all the Regiment were well enough grounded in H.A.C. history to be aware of it: but one memory of an older war did not lack notice in war diaries. When Mersa Matruh's defences were passed, with their death's-head warnings waving over the perimeter minefields, when the intriguing road-junction of "Charing Cross" was behind them, with its signpost "Sidi Barrani, Sollum, Bardia, Tobruk", the deeply-rutted Siwa track to the south-west led the Regiment past the battleground of El Halazin, where in January 1916 A Battery had driven off the Senussi after an eight-hour fight.

Through the 100-mile-long belt of wire that marked the Libyan frontier from Bardia southwards past Fort Maddalena, the Regiment passed with a thrill, knowing they were in enemy territory at last, though the battle line towards which they were moving lay still 300 miles ahead.

Not all the battle line, however. As they approached the frontier there came, from away on their right, the sound of gunfire—the first the Regiment had heard in war. By-passed by General Auchinleck's advance, the enemy posts at Bardia, at Sollum and at Halfaya Pass still held out,[2] denying us the use of the coastal road.

Many lessons were learned towards the end of the year (1941) from a divisional exercise at El Cuasc. Units discovered—a fact to be demonstrated time and again in actual battle—how easy it was, in the Desert, to miss the enemy altogether, as when a brigade headquarters, "coaching" two armoured regiments toward their objectives, found themselves suddenly up against the enemy, whom the armoured units had unknowingly by-passed.

Christmas Eve 1941 saw a pleasant reunion, when a troop of the Roughriders' Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, with their four Bofors guns, joined E Battery in the 9 Lancers column, giving H.A.C. men the chance of swapping peace-time reminiscences with their old friends and neighbours in Bunhill Row.

Christmas Day brought the news that Benghazi had fallen. Parties from the batteries drove into battered Tobruk. Long marches by compass bearing led 11 Regiment through recent battlefields littered with jettisoned Italian equipment, burnt-out tanks and lorries, straight south-west across the base of the coastal hills, the Jebel Akhdar.

Throughout four weeks' journey across some 700 miles of desert, drivers and fitters had kept their vehicles going. Maintenance on a scale the most ardent of H.A.C. motorists had never dreamed of had now become a vital routine: constant cleaning of filters; vigilance at refills to prevent sand clogging carburettors and petrol supply; tightening of bolts at every halt; above all a meticulous, sometimes almost despairing attention to tyres.

Virtually every man, in those strenuous days, had become a fitter; just as, during the long marches, virtually every man had become a driver and a cook.

On 10 January 1942, 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment were east of Saunnu, still a matter of forty miles behind the firing line, when the Brigade Major of 1 Support Group, Major R. W. Goodbody (late Adjutant, H.A.C.), passed from battery to battery bringing news of a new phase in the Regiment's campaigning: their dispersal into individual batteries, each part of a "Jock Column" under whose auspices they would, eight days later, fire their first rounds in action.

We can leave the Regiment there for a while: with battery and troop commanders up among the sand dunes north of the Wadi el Faregh—dodging the twice-daily dive-bombing raids of Stukas; learning the "tip and run" tactics of the Jock Columns. Time, now, to scan the terrain over which they had come, and over which they would fight for the next fifteen months; and to review the events which had brought General Auchinleck's 8 Army from the fringes of the Nile Delta to the Gulf of Sirte.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

[1] Ecclesiastes 7, 6.

[2] Bardia fell to the South Africans on the night 1/2 January 1942; Sollum on 12 January and Halfaya on 17 January.

3. THE DESERT

Though it figures in military history as "The Desert", the strip of sea coast over which, for 33 months, the tide of war ebbed and flowed was in truth the mere fringe of that great expanse. From Mauretania's Atlantic shore to the Abyssinian highlands the real Desert sprawls across 3600 miles of northern Africa; a wilderness as big as Europe. For 1600 miles as the vulture flies it lines the Mediterranean. Thence it rolls southwards until it merges, six hundred miles north of the Equator, with the grassland and the savannah, prelude to the tropical forest.

Only one fiftieth of this space was needed for the sixfold battle into which 11 Regiment were about to plunge. Their wildest and widest excursions seldom carried our armoured adventurers as much as 60 miles from the sea.[1] They fought their campaign in an area about as large as England and Wales.

It was the emptiness of the battleground that enhanced its vastness. Tracts as big as English counties could not, even in time of peace, muster a population of one to the square mile, save for a month only, when fierce coastal rains mantle the seaward fringe with an evanescent blush of green. Then the Desert is, by comparison, populous, as a single Bedouin family trudge over the sand, leading their flock from the rare oases of the deep south to browse on these fleeting pastures.

The Italians, wary of nomads who would yield them no allegiance, rounded up all the Bedouin they could lay hands on. Still, nevertheless, they would on occasion appear, suddenly and silently as the *djinn* of their fairy tales—a handful of menfolk with their women, a dozen sheep, maybe a couple of camels—to warn some wandering battle casualty, cut off from his comrades, which way lay safety and which way danger.

Swiftly as it comes, brief springtime gives way to fierce summer, when all that grows is grey-green shrub which only a camel would condescend to eat. Thenceforward lower nature shuns as obdurately as man these barren wastes; where gazelle cannot find its frugal grazing nor fox its prey, but leave the bleak landscape to the jerboa, the desert rat whose characteristics so resemble those of the desert armies; in its progress by jumps; its inability to stand up without its tail; the burrows it excavates; its extreme reluctance to be captured and its pertinacity, when taken, in devising means of escape.

Soldiers who scanned their desert maps reckoned the picture crowded if it showed one stretch of hillocks, one abandoned water cistern, in a grid space of 40 square miles. Yet those areas to which the map maker will not vouchsafe even one whiskered ridge are not so flat and featureless as the blank square would suggest. Sand dunes, their windward side rising in a gradual slope till they plunge to leeward in a steep 60-foot descent, complicate the tank commander's navigation, diversify his tactics; and provide the gunner with welcome cover, fleeting targets and occasional surprises.

With these ripples of the sandy sea, a single grid square might combine any variety, or indeed all varieties, of desert going: rock plateaux planed smooth by sand storms (*hard on tracks*); stretches of loose pebbles strewn over a foot-deep layer of fine sand with rock beneath (*passable, but slow going*); firm gravel (*good going while it lasts*); saltpan, unreliable as December ice, which may support a tracked vehicle so long as it keeps moving, or may let it down without warning into the marsh beneath; soft dry dust in which tank or lorry could churn itself hull deep; and, scattered haphazard, patches of yellowish clay which change, after a deluge of coastal rain, to a slimy mud such as would immobilise any vehicle from a tank to a donkey barrow.

Travellers on long-distance flight high above the Desert may well remark upon its sameness. Those who have lived and fought in it testify to the Desert's uncanny combination of intense monotony with bewildering variety.

Even the small section of the country over which the fluctuating battle moved varies in altitude from below sea level to 3600 feet. Its climate provides anything from blistering heat, beating down from a brazen sky at 120 degrees (not "in the shade"; there is no shade) to plunges below freezing point that set the ice tinkling in the breakfast milk-jug.

There are nights which only a poet can describe when, after a sunset of flaming splendour, a golden moon transforms the plain of sand into a shimmering silver sea. There are days of concentrated beastliness when the *khamsin* is blowing; when blinding hot particles of sand bring visibility to zero, filling eyes and mouth and nostrils, penetrating clothing, impregnating food, coating all metal surfaces, leaving behind, as they whirl away, a drab veil hung across a grey Desert, while the sun, a livid disc, shines wanly from a pale green sky. There are days, too, when the landscape, shaking and blurred with the heat, will dissolve in the masquerade of the mirage, so that friend and enemy move warily, doubtful of what their eyes tell them.

War across these desert wastes has been likened to war at sea. True, there is room for unfettered manœuvre, with prospect of swift victory for the dexterous and bold. The comparison is nevertheless an illusion. A ship is free to manœuvre where she can, and fight where she will, because she carries fuel, ammunition, food and water for weeks and maybe months, and need not ponder too anxiously upon replenishment until her battle is over. Even her wounded she can take with her, tending them as she goes.

Not thus in desert war. In ammunition, food, fuel and water the armoured forces are provisioned only for a few days or even hours. Their replenishment is a problem such as no one can conceive—still less solve—who has not taken part in desert fighting.

Senussi troops, ranging deep into the south in pre-war days, were reckoned to need, per head, a gallon of water a day. Many a long-range foray in Libya was carried through by men whose daily allowance was one or two cupfuls.

You can ration the man. When half a gallon a head has to suffice for the vehicle's crew *and* its radiator, a man learns to wash, shave and clean his teeth on half a mug—and then strain it carefully towards the radiator's quota. You cannot ration the machine. A gun detachment or a tank crew whose water supply is running down solve their personal problem by not washing, by cutting their tea brew to one cup a day. The clamour of the boiling radiator cannot so easily be stilled.

It is on record that a Ford V8, running down wind in a *khamsin*, will do three miles to a gallon of water.

Add to the water problem the problem of fuel. Petrol sufficient for 250 miles on the road will take a lorry only 100 miles across the Desert. Add ammunition again, and food. It begins to be conceivable that 100 tanks with their backing of artillery might be attended, in desert warfare, by 2000 motor vehicles. Well might von Ravenstein, Rommel's spearhead general, say "Libya is a paradise for the tactician, a purgatory for the quartermaster".

Such, then, was the terrain in which 11 Regiment were to receive their baptism of fire.

NOTE TO CHAPTER THREE

[1] This may seem to take no count of the Long Range Desert Group, whose activities bore much the same relation to the large-scale prosecution of the war as the *cadenza* bears to a concerto. Operating from such remote regions as the Siwa Oasis; ranging stretches of desert neither charted nor even explored, these ghostly marauders exerted a tremendous effect on the enemy (particularly the Italian) morale. Their contribution to victory was out of all proportion to their strength. Nevertheless, their numbers were small and their influence on the course of the battle was necessarily only incidental.

BELOW

THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING AND QUEEN WITH OFFICERS OF 11 REGIMENT

LEFT TO RIGHT, FRONT: *Capt. G. R. Armstrong, Major W. A. Sheil(k), Major J. McDermid, Lord Galway, Colonel Commandant, H.M. the King, H.M. the Queen, Lt.-Col. W. A. Ebbels, Major J. F. Adye, Major R. C. Croxton, Capt. A. E. C. Green.*

SECOND ROW: *Rev. K. C. Oliver, Capt. W. P. Colley, Capt. J. W. Hopkins(k), Capt. J. V. C. Pearson, Capt. H. Bourne(k), Capt. J. P. Sworder, Capt. R. H. W. Dunn, Capt. M. L. Gilbert, Capt. F. B. S. Maclaren, Capt. (Q.M.) H. L. Bedwell, Capt. D. E. Yarrow, R.A.M.C.*

THIRD ROW: *Lieut. J. H. McAllum(k), Lieut. J. P. Mills, Lieut. G. N. P. C. de Boinville, Lieut. M. W. G. Wathen, Lieut. G. Buchanan, Lieut. P. R. Poland, Lieut. R. L. Trapnell, Lieut. R. N. Smith, Lieut. P. M. Britton(k), Lieut. J. L. F. Armitage(k).*

FOURTH ROW: *Lieut. S. E. Hobson, Lieut. J. P. Charles, Lieut. K. E. Bolton, Lieut. D. F. Waugh, Lieut. S. A. G. Watt(k), Lieut. R. E. K. Norwood (R.E.M.E.), Lieut. J. W. Venning(k), Lieut. M. M. Crocker, Lieut. J. M. Page, Lieut. H. F. C. Tompson(k).*

BACK ROW: *Lieut. T. F. Butler-Stoney(k), Lieut. M. V. Boys(k), Lieut. R. R. Seel, Lieut. B. H. S. Laskey(k), Lieut. W. P. Shovelton, 2/Lieut. C. E. P. Hole, 2/Lieut. C. G. A. Leechman(k).*

(k) *Killed in action*

4. THE TANGLED SKEIN

So much for the place. Now the time.

On 18 January 1942 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment Royal Horse Artillery first fired their guns in battle, across a stretch of sand dunes some 30 miles from the coast of the Gulf of Sirte and about 100 miles south of the little white seaport of Benghazi.[1]

What causes brought this moment into being will be discussed as long as men care to study military history.

They included the high destinies of states; the obstinacies of rulers; the alternate shufflings or high resolution of politicians, the oscillation, from pusillanimity to fortitude, of parliaments; the production line of factories (not lightly to be disturbed); momentary blind indecisions by generals normally resolute; the difficulty which intelligence staffs experience in discovering, and military spokesmen in telling, the truth about battles; the precise ratio at a given moment of the hitting power of cordite propellant and nickel-nosed shell to the protecting power of armour plate; the curious blind spot in the minds of military technicians, who followed with painstaking alacrity[2] the gun-*versus*-armour conflict but pondered two years of warfare's bitterest lessons before they managed to provide artillerymen with the protection of self-propelled guns.

All these elements—plus, of course, the weather, ingredient in every history—played their part. Not least, "that article" (as Wellington said, designating the soldiery who served him: "it all depends on that article"). So, to the causes which brought the H.A.C. to those sand dunes must be added the personal equation of the fighting soldier. Did he know his business—not in general terms but in the light of the exorbitant demands of desert warfare? Was the administrative "tail", on which he leaned, vigorous and compact and close at hand, or was it over-stretched and weakened by the strain of a long and swift advance over

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OPPOSITE

THEIR MAJESTIES WITH 11 REGIMENT (see page 4)

LEFT TO RIGHT, UPPER: *"Baron" Ebbels, Major Donald Lascelles (A.D.C.), H.M. the King, Lord Galway, L/Bdr. B. Dobson.*

LOWER: *L/Bdr. Field, Major John McDermid, H.M. the Queen.*

roadless wastes? Was he on his toes? Or had he already expended his last ounce when the call came for one effort more?

Such factors, in greater or lesser degree, had shaped the fashion of desert warfare before 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A., first unit of the Honourable Artillery Company to serve overseas, came into battle.

It may be well to survey the course of events which serve as prelude to the Regiment's fighting record.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1] There was scant opportunity for such reflections then, but there must have been classicists among the H.A.C.'s heterogeneous personnel who knew about Benghazi. Its smoother name was Berenice, bestowed by Ptolemy III in honour of his wife; who loved him so much that she offered her hair to Venus to buy his safe return from war. The gods would not let such beautiful tresses lie on an earthly altar, but snatched them up to form a constellation. In the sunken gardens behind Berenice, the Gardens of the Hesperides, grew the golden apples on whose capture Hercules expended his last-but-one labour; the apples which Hippomenes so unsportingly strewed—but all's fair in love—to win his race with Atalanta.

[2] From the gunners' and tank crews' point of view this alacrity was by no means obvious. The authorities at home were faced with a difficult choice; and, as happens occasionally to administrators as well as generals, they backed the wrong horse. They were aware—the soldiers had seen to that—of the need for a heavier, hard-hitting, low-trajectory, high-velocity (and much more accurate) gun, with longer barrel. But production of the 2-pounder was in full swing. Should they switch, and risk having no guns for a while for the new tanks coming off the line? They chose quantity rather than efficiency; a mistake that cost many lives.

5. PROLOGUE TO BATTLE—I

1939—*February* 1941

In June 1940 it was apparent to Hitler that Britain was beaten. She had not yet acclimatised herself to the idea, but the facts spoke for themselves. All that she had by way of an army had quitted the Continent, never (the augurs said) to return. A quarter of a million men, with such arms only as they could carry on their shoulders, had waded out to the little boats that lined the Dunkirk beaches. Their equipment was in German hands; much of it smashed or burning, but anyway lost to them.

In a fit of pathological fury Hitler had turned down his generals' advice that his Panzer tanks, poised within an hour's run of Dunkirk, should cut in and seize the port before the British could reach the sea. The Luftwaffe could look after the British, as they were eager to do. For the German Army the destruction of the French forces was the paramount task.

That, too, had been accomplished. Petain had sued for an armistice. The Germans had entered Paris. Within the same week the last two British formations on French soil had been dealt with. A Panzer divisional commander, one Erwin Rommel, rapidly making a name in the handling of armour, had rounded up at St. Valery that formation of legendary renown, 51 (Highland) Division. Britain's First (and only) Armoured Division had embarked—what was left of them—from Brest, salving such tanks as they could but leaving most of them behind either as scrap or as German booty.[1] When Italy gallantly rushed to the rescue of the victor it smacked of anti-climax.

Three choices now faced the Führer. In the event, the almost inconceivable event, of Britain's refusing to sue for peace, Britain must be invaded. Neither the annals of the past nor the prognostications of his admirals and generals lent him confidence in the outcome of such an enterprise. There must in any event be a condition precedent, the elimination of the Royal Air Force. Exultingly Reichsmarschall Herman Goering flung his air fleets into battle, presenting 273 Battery. 86 (H.A,C.) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment with their first enemy target.

There was another way of humbling Britain—to wrest away her lordship of the Mediterranean, where no small share of her past laurels had been won. It was a project never far in the background of Hitler's thoughts. There loomed, however, in this remarkable mind a prescience which events were to vindicate. No conquest of Egypt would be feasible while Britannia ruled the Mediterranean waves. Once close the Straits of Gibraltar . . . To cautious soundings on the subject, Spain's dictator General Franco responded with alacrity. Give him the reversion to Gibraltar, French Morocco and Western Algeria; give him petrol and wheat, and he was the Führer's man. With non-committal thanks, Hitler sent a mission to examine how Gibraltar might be captured.

France, then, was prostrate. Britain's fate, if she continued to resist (but surely she would not!) was with equal sureness sealed. Low though his estimate of his remaining foes had fallen—"I saw them at Munich. They are little worms"—Hitler would hardly have believed with what thoroughness they had, in the nerveless years, emptied their arsenals: melting for sale as scrap the artillery of seventy 1918 divisions; pouring into spluttering furnaces, by tens of millions of rounds, the small arms ammunition for lack of which thousands of men had gone to France without firing a practice shot.[2]

Yet something of her bankruptcy he must have known. He knew, too, that, given time, the armament she had squandered would be replenished. Unmartial America, however bemused with her fantasies of perpetual peace through the League of Nations, had nevertheless kept her guns in grease, and was already, as the arsenal of democracy, packing for Britain 500,000 rifles, 80,000 machine-guns, 900 field guns. This Hitler knew, but without misgiving. In so far as military science is a matter of mathematics, as to some extent it is, there could be little doubt Britain would be crushed before she could rearm.

With regard to his enemies, then, Hitler saw reason to be confident; not so with his friends. History may guess, but perhaps will never know, whether, when Russia and Germany signed their non-aggression pact in September 1939, both parties were already resolved to dishonour it. Before it had run a year, in any event, it had become merely a hazard of time and convenience which would be first to break the cynical bargain.

Russia was first. By mid-June the rape of Lithuania, which was to have been a co-operative one, had become virtually a Soviet monopoly, Russian troops taking over areas allotted to Germany and refusing, despite Hitler's protests, to withdraw. Within a week betrayal in the north was matched by treachery in the south, as the Soviets demanded from Rumania not only Bessarabia but also Bukovina, not nominated in the bond.

Any misgivings he had in the West were overtopped by alarm in the East, as Hitler saw Russian troops billeted within 100 miles of his oil supply. Before war in the Desert had progressed beyond a skirmish, before Goering's airmen, briefed for the Battle of Britain, had raised their glasses to *Der Tag*, Hitler had told his assembled generals that in May 1941 he would attack Russia.

All other timings must wait upon that.

Meanwhile, all that negotiation could do, to clear the decks for the struggle in the East, should be done. If Britain would withdraw from the contest, she should have an easy peace. The Papal Nuncio at Berne was asked to speed to the right quarter a message to that effect. Copies of Hitler's "last appeal to reason", dropped over Britain by high-flying aircraft, were auctioned for the Red Cross at country bazaars. Petain's price for a Franco-German alliance against Britain, Franco's price for free passage of a German army to seize Gibraltar were discussed; even Stalin's price for switching from passive hostility against Britain to active war. One by one the plots fell through, as the question arose at each conference table: Is it quite certain, though, that Britain is down and out?

Petain, in October 1940, agreed to almost everything, but not to open war against Britain, where already General de Gaulle was marshalling his Free French forces. Franco affirmed in September his "unchallengeable and sincere adherence to you, personally, to the German people and the cause in which you fight", but by December had decided that he would not yield a right of way through Spain until Britain was on the point of collapse. Stalin, in November, found it "entirely acceptable in principle" to share out the British Empire with Germany, Italy and Japan providing that Russia got, in addition, a grip on the Dardanelles and the oilwells of Persia; but, as Molotov, Stalin's envoy in Berlin, asked Ribbentrop, his host, "if England is defeated and powerless, why have we been sitting in your air raid shelter?"

It was, indeed, becoming apparent to a surprised world that the obituary notices on the demise of Britain had been premature.

In five weeks of indomitable gallantry, 1400 fighter pilots of the Royal Air Force—led by the ardent vision of Dowding, equipped by the daemonic energy of Beaverbrook—had dispelled, in the Battle of Britain, all Hitler's hopes of invasion and won time for Britain to re-equip.

The nation's spirit, doomed by all the probabilities to defence and the contemplation of defeat, surged under the leadership of Winston Churchill to attack and concentration on victory.

Sharing neither Hitler's conquests in Europe, nor his plans nor his frustrations, Mussolini sought his triumphs, apart from a rash and much repented venture in Greece, in the conquest of Egypt. In view of the forces at his disposal—nine divisions in Tripolitania, five more in Cyrenaica, a total of 215,000 men with an air force of formidable size—he showed little initiative in grasping a prize which must have seemed, by military arithmetic, ripe for the picking.

The forces arrayed against him were small and, in the British pre-war fashion, woefully equipped. General Sir Archibald Wavell, appointed Commander-in-Chief Middle East in 1939, had under his command a mobile division, later to win undying fame as 7 Armoured Division, the "Desert Rats"; the Cairo Infantry Brigade garrisoning Mersa Matruh, halfway to the Libyan frontier, and 4 Indian Division minus one brigade. To these had been added, early in the year, two Dominion formations of high quality but little grasp, as yet, of the exigencies of a desert campaign—6 Australian and the New Zealand Division. Field and medium artillery was meagre, anti-aircraft virtually non-existent, motor transport utterly inadequate. Matchless in courage and skill, the minute and ill-equipped R.A.F. contingents could put into the air only a fraction of the strength arrayed against them.[3]

Despite the paucity of his forces, General Wavell took the offensive from the moment Britain declared war against Italy—1 a.m. on 11 June 1940. Within a week the two Italian forts guarding the Libyan frontier—Capuzzo and Maddalena—had been destroyed. A new instrument of war, the Jock Column, had spread alarm and despondency deep within the Italian lines. Invented and fostered by Lieut.-Colonel J. C. Campbell, 4 R.H.A.[4] (later to win the V.C., to command 7 Armoured Division and to meet his death in a motor accident), these columns were small forces of armoured cars, 25-pounders and motorised infantry, trained to combine hard hitting with the utmost mobility.

By September 1940 Marshal Graziani, the Italian Commander-in-Chief, with 3500 casualties to reckon against 150 British losses, had gained so exaggerated an idea of the forces ranged against him that when he did at last cautiously take the offensive his thrust carried him no further than Sidi Barrani, some fifty miles over the Egyptian border and 80 miles short of Mersa Matruh, where the main British force awaited him.

Nevertheless, it was two months before Lieut.-General R. N. O'Connor,[5] commanding the Western Desert Force, could deliver his counterstroke.

When it did come, it gave a jubilant public at home the first victory of the war. Begun in General Wavell's most cautious mood as a probing raid, it had lunged forward as each opportunity was daringly seized. As one division (4 Indian as far as Sidi Barrani; 6 Australian for the rest of the advance) battered their way along the coastal road, the more mobile 7 Armoured Division, in semi-circular sweeps, cut across the Italians' successive lines of retreat—until, at Beda Fomm, the last of Italy's 10 Army, pouring south from Benghazi, found arrayed across their path once more the Desert Rats.

With radiators boiling, with one cupful a day as their water ration, 7 Armoured Division had driven by compass 30 hours across unmapped desert and shown the enemy in two days' desperate fight that further struggle was useless.

Exultingly, Mr. Winston Churchill could report to Parliament that the Army of the Nile, never more than two divisions strong, had advanced 500 miles in two months, destroyed an Italian army of four corps, captured 130,000 prisoners, 400 tanks, 1290 guns, vehicles by the thousand and countless stores at a cost in British casualties of fewer than 2000 men killed and wounded.

General Berganzoli, the diminutive bearded commander whose bravery, elusiveness and bombastic prophecies had earned him world-wide fame under the soldier's nickname of "Electric Whiskers", had surrendered to a major of the Rifle Brigade and gone to Dehra Dun to join in captivity more generals—as one writer put it[6]—than India had seen together since the 1911 Durbar.

And almost to the day, as Benghazi fell, Greece, threatened by overwhelming German forces, asked for six divisions.

Probably no general in history has found himself, on the morn of victory, in a dilemma so intricate as at this moment General Wavell had to face.

In Libya itself his forward troops were 700 miles from their base. They had only arrived there by eking out their dilapidated transport and diminishing water, petrol and food with supplies captured from their routed enemies: at each advance biting the hand that unwillingly fed them. To re-equip them, to reinforce them, were problem enough; but from all points of the compass fresh liabilities pressed upon him. To the south there was Abyssinia to be reconquered (where the Duke of Aosta had 300,000 men); and British Somaliland, the sole British territory, except for the Channel Islands, which had yet fallen into enemy hands. Prestige called for this; and, weightier, the threat of the Red Sea closed and a new battle front in the Sudan.

To the East, our small but vital air garrisons in Baghdad might any day find themselves in peril—as, in Raschid Ali's brief but ominous revolt, they presently did. In the north, the passive aid which Vichy French forces in Syria were giving to Germany might at any moment flare into active military operations.

And if Greece fell, and the whole Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean were swept into Hitler's grasp, what chance of holding Egypt, menaced on two sides?

Not Atlas could have supported, alone, such a burden. The War Cabinet at home shouldered it as best they could. Around the Middle East flew Mr. Anthony Eden and Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, conferring with statesmen. The decision was that the campaign in Greece and Crete was imperative. General Wavell must now do what he was told to do—the impossible.

Whether the decision was wrong; whether it should have been foreseen that the disaster, so soon to overwhelm the forces thrown into Greece and Crete, was inevitable; whether the time they bought was, in the end, worth so costly a price, it is idle to discuss now. In the light of after events it seems a calamitous decision; but as Frederick the Great said, if generals could fight their battles 24 hours after they were fought, what impeccable strategists they would be!

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

[1] Twenty-five tanks came back from France out of 704 sent out.

[2] It is an illustration of the trend of the times that General Hobart, the creator of 7 Armoured Division, had been put on the retired list in 1940 at the age of 55, and had become a corporal in the Home Guard. Fortunately wiser counsels prevailed. He was restored to the active list in 1941 and commanded another of his creations, the specialised 79 Armoured Division, throughout the campaign in North-West Europe.

[3] There were 12 Hurricanes in Africa.

[4] B Battery 1914.

[5] He commanded 2 Battalion H.A.C. in the 1914-18 war.

[6] "Rommel" (Desmond Young).

6. PROLOGUE TO BATTLE—II

March—November 1941

As Italy's defeat in Libya reached its climax, Mussolini swallowed what was left of his pride and agreed to accept German "aid". Lieut.-General Rommel arrived on 15 February 1941 with the advance guard of the Afrika Korps. His orders were replete with injunctions to be cautious; to *plan*, by March 1941, an attack to reconquer Cyrenaica only. He was deeply read in military history. Perhaps he had also read of Nelson putting his telescope to his blind eye.

On 31 March 1941 he so far honoured his orders as to mount "an aggressive reconnaissance". That "reconnaissance" fell on the newly arrived, half trained, half equipped formations with which Wavell, having diverted half his forces to Greece, was compelled to hold his front line. Cutting across the Desert Rommel struck 2 Armoured Division at Mekili before they knew he was there, capturing their commander, Major-General Gambier-Parry, in his tent. Stabbing northward simultaneously, he put Benghazi's diminished garrison in such confusion that their tanks, returning from a sortie, found their reserve of petrol had been burnt to save it from falling into German hands; so that, fuel-less, they had to be left. Overwhelmed in their first action, 3 Indian Motor Brigade fought their way out through a ring of armour.

Rommel had tremendous luck: as when a covey of his motor cyclists, coming upon a retreating British convoy stuck on the road, held up a group of officers at pistol point and found they had captured the recently knighted General O'Connor, doyen of desert fighters, now Commander of the British Troops in Egypt, and Lieut.-General Philip Neame, V.C., the recently-appointed Commander of XIII Corps.

Yes, Rommel had luck. He had also Mark III and Mark IV (support) tanks whose 50-mm. and 75-mm.[1] guns hit hard at 1000-1500 yards. Against him were arrayed, at best, cruiser tanks whose 2-pounders, ranging at 600-800 yards, splashed harmlessly on the 30-mm. German armour. Mathematics is still a factor in war—the mathematics of 4-pounder against 2-pounder, of 1500 yards range against 800. The British Army *had* a weapon which could counter even the toughest German tanks—the 25-pounder gun; only in this battle, and every battle for the next 18 months, it was served in the open, without cover for the gun detachments. This was not without its cost in artillery casualties.

The speed of Rommel's advance astounded his enemies and surprised even himself. By the date his plan for the reconquest of Cyrenaica was to be considered, the job was done. He was in contact with the British defence line at Sollum, back on the Egyptian border. But his advance had spent itself. His units, in turn, had outrun their supplies. German prisoners captured in forays in and out of the frontier wire were almost delirious with thirst.

Rommel had pulled things together to such effect by 15 May 1941 that he was able to beat back Wavell's effort to regain possession of the vital Halfaya (or, as of course the soldiery called it, Hellfire) Pass, believed to be the only place apart from Sollum where tanks could climb the 200-foot escarpment which divided the coastal plain from the main Desert.

This ill-starred little action—Operation Battleaxe—deserves remembrance for a Balaclava-like moment when a squadron of 2 Royal Tank Regiment, breasting a slight rise, found themselves faced with six enemy field guns and a dozen anti-tank guns—and charged and overran them out of hand.

Two things, however, set Rommel's advance on a lower plane than Wavell's forward movement of three months earlier. He had not destroyed the army opposed to him: Wavell had extricated his troops with fewer than 3000 casualties. And he had not captured Tobruk.

Now Rommel in his turn had a taste of what Wavell had suffered. Suddenly his Afrika Korps ceased to be in the limelight, with priority for reinforcements and supplies: for on 22 June 1941 Hitler had flung his armies at Russia. Cyrenaica, the conquest of Egypt, the capture of Malta, became for the time being a side-show. While both opponents sat back, taking breath for the next round, General Wavell departed to become Commander-in-Chief in India; handing over his command to General Auchinleck.

Mr. Churchill put it nicely to the House of Commons: "We have ridden the willing horse to a standstill." He had been told to do the impossible and had not quite done it.

There was a feeling among the public at home—recking as little of Wavell's burden and achievement as of life on Mars—that he was being "kicked upstairs" because he had lost his grip. Rommel, who was perhaps in the best posture to judge, did not think so. He thought Wavell a genius.

From their respective headquarters—General Auchinleck in Cairo, Rommel mainly in the captured British armoured command truck of which he was so proud (*Mammut*, the mammoth, he called it)—the opposing generals planned and organised fresh attacks, on dates which almost coincided. 18 November 1941 was the day chosen by Auchinleck; 23 November was Rommel's choice.

Their objectives were, as the textbooks of physics put it, equal and opposite: to destroy, ultimately, the enemy's forces; but for the immediate moment to bring to an end the siege of Tobruk: Rommel, by capturing, Auchinleck by relieving the beleaguered town.

The circumference of care in the midst of which Wavell had laboured no longer harassed the British Commander-in-Chief. He had no anxieties about Greece and Crete, because they were lost; nor about Syria, Abyssinia, Somaliland, because they were won. Only Baghdad needed an occasional wary glance. That apart, General Auchinleck could concentrate on what was henceforward to be called 8 Army and the action—Operation Crusader—which they were to fight.

NOTE TO CHAPTER SIX

[1] This was the short 75-mm. The Mark IV Panzer with the long medium-velocity 75-mm. gun, with an effective range of 2000 yards, came into use later. The Regiment first encountered these about 5 June, at Knightsbridge. (See page 75.)

7. PROLOGUE TO BATTLE—III

November 1941—*January* 1942

Rommel knew a British attack was in the offing. The babble of Cairo, last place in the world for the maintenance of security, ensured that. He did not know, however, when it was coming. He was, in fact, in Rome two days before the battle began; combining, as commanding generals can now and then, a spot of leave (his wife and he lunched together on his fiftieth birthday) with a serious and successful conference.

Not only was he unaware of the precise date when Auchinleck's blow would fall. He did not know that the sizeable assembly of lorries behind the British lines, which his reconnaissance planes no doubt reported, was really a heavy reinforcement of tanks, each camouflaged by the device known as a sunshade; nor that the stores which the Navy had offloaded in beleaguered Tobruk included tanks for 70 Division's projected sortie.

Each commander had planned, for his assault, a double drive. Rommel's design was to use 15 Panzer Division to subjugate Tobruk, while 21 Panzer Division dealt with the British main body. Auchinleck had confided to XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Godwin-Austen) the relief of Tobruk: to XXX Corps (Lieut.-General Willoughby Norrie) a thrust round Rommel's south flank to destroy his army. Meanwhile a highly mobile force were despatched across the Desert, across the chord of Jebel Akhdar's seaward arc, to cut through Rommel's lines of communication. Nothing was heard of them for a month.

For six days the fight raged with unremitting ferocity as motorised infantry, following the carrier platoons, fought it out on foot over a triangle of 400 square miles. The airfield and ridge of Sidi Rezegh, apex of the triangle and objective of the attack, was taken, retaken and taken again.

For one brief spell Rommel himself was in the van of a thrust, the very threat of which flung the British rear echelons into confusion. Cutting through the frontier wire at Bir Sheferzen, he found himself in a forward hospital; dismounted for a word with his wounded men—and discovered, as they sat up in amazement, that he was in a British medical unit.

He got away, halted for the night, unbeknown, in the midst of 4 Indian Division, and got away again. He thought for a moment there was nothing between his Panzer thrust and Egypt; but there was—7 Indian Brigade, who gave his tanks a shrewd knock.

Nevertheless, it looked as if Rommel was getting the upper hand. General Auchinleck flew up from Cairo to direct the battle. By a sudden decision he replaced General Cunningham, handing the command of 8 Army to General Ritchie. But Rommel had shot his bolt. On 5 December 1941 his retreat began.

Auchinleck knew—the battling troops had neither time nor heed—that Hong Kong had fallen; that Singapore had at most a few weeks to go; that divisions en route to help him push on to Tripoli were being diverted to the Far East, with the anti-tank, the anti-aircraft guns, the light bomber squadrons he so badly needed; that two of his Australian divisions were being recalled to cope with perils nearer their home. It was now or never. Exhausted though his troops were, and slowed down by straitened supplies, he must take the risk and push on as best he could.

By 16 December 1941 Rommel was back at Agedabia. On 6 January 1942 he withdrew to Agheila, a naturally strong position across the narrow strip of firm land between the sea and a morass of salt marsh and soft sand patches interspersed with dunes.

Half his Afrika Korps were dead or prisoners. His Italian allies—stripped of their transport, they said, and left in the lurch—had battled gallantly here and there; but for the time being they could be written off. He had lost 800 aircraft; close on 400 tanks. Nevertheless, it had been a retreat, not a rout. Auchinleck's force, now arrived at Beda Fomm and reinforced with tanks and artillery, were faced with no such glorious round-up as Wavell's men had made ten months back. Behind a defence line, whose real strength the British forces had no time to assess, Rommel was re-equipping his Panzer Divisions with speed and skill.

This, as they say in cinemas, was where 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. came in, firing their first round in action on 18 January 1942.

8. THE JOCK COLUMNS

January 1942

11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. entered the battle, a battery at a time, as supporting artillery to three of the Jock Columns into which the Support Group of 1 Armoured Division had been divided. Each column had, as a code name, the Christian name or nickname of the commander:

Baron Column: Lieut.-Colonel ("Baron") W. A. Ebbels; A Battery; two companies 2 K.R.R.C.

James Column: Lieut.-Colonel T. J. B. Bosville, 1 R.B.; B Battery; Battalion H.Q. and one motor company, 1 R.B.

Charles Column: Lieut.-Colonel C. N. D. Sismey, 2 K.R.R.C.; E Battery less H Troop; Battalion H.Q. and two companies, 2 K.R.R.C.

Each column also included troops from 76 Anti-Tank Regiment and Anti-Aircraft (Bofors) troops from 61 L.A.A. Regiment.

The Reserve Column, commanded by Major V. Turner, Rifle Brigade, included H Troop (E Battery). Its chief function was to protect the Support Group's B Echelon.

This splitting of forces was open to objections which were probably as obvious to the Commander-in-Chief as they certainly were to his subordinate commanders. It broke up fighting formations who, in the cross-desert march, had welded themselves together in a confident understanding of each other's personalities, plans and methods. It was a negation of the principle honoured since the days of Clausewitz and vindicated time and again in the Desert—the principle of bringing the greatest possible force to bear at the decisive point.

The original role of these Jock Columns was in any event out of date as far as the present battle was concerned. Their sudden forays deep into the enemy's rear, which had so often spread alarm and dismay among the Italians, were less likely to panic the steadier German Panzer units.

Against these factors General Auchinleck had to set several considerations. His immediate objective was to relieve, in the foremost areas, the emaciated and battleworn columns into which 7 Armoured Division's Support Group had also been divided; and this was the task allotted to the Support Group of 1 Armoured Division.

General Auchinleck knew little of Rommel's dispositions and strength. Air reconnaissance, with attenuated air squadrons and haphazard landing grounds, had daily grown more difficult. Probing the enemy's front with ground forces involved threading an uncharted labyrinth of lanes of firm going between patches, 10 miles long and five wide, of either salt marsh or almost impassable soft sand. Only small compact forces, closely held in hand, could hope to edge their way in and—more vital—to make their way out if they came upon strong enemy concentrations.

The immediate functions of the newly formed Jock Columns were strictly defined: to reconnoitre; to prevent the enemy from doing the same; to harass the enemy as opportunity offered; but not (repeat NOT, as the Army signallers say) to allow themselves to be "pinned to the ground".

If they met with opposition they were to withdraw, fighting a delaying action and trying to lure the enemy out of his defence line towards 2 Armoured Brigade who awaited him northward in the region of Antelat.

Any such sortie was considered unlikely. By the Intelligence staff's reckoning the enemy had no more than 80 tanks—mostly Italian tanks at that. It would be weeks before he could offer battle. Operations for the time being—so said Major-General F. W. Messervy, the acting Divisional Commander, in a "pep talk" to regimental officers early in January—would be like a practice camp: little action and a good deal of boredom. (Major-General Herbert Lumsden, who had brought the Division up to the front, was wounded in an air attack almost as soon as he reached the forward area. Himself an H.A.C. man—he served with 2A Battery in 1914—he was as fond of the Regiment as the Regiment were fond of him.)

The columns were to move in one at a time, at 24-hour intervals; going into leaguer on arrival alongside the 7 Armoured Division column they were relieving, which would move back before dawn. All existing code names and signs were to continue in use, with the same radio-telephone frequencies; a precaution, however, which is unlikely to have deceived the attentively listening enemy who knew, by now, the voice of each commander.

9. INTO BATTLE—I

January 1942

On 17 January Baron Column were about 20 miles north of Mn Bettafal, the south-western end of the precipitous escarpment which, backed by the sandy wastes of the Wadi el Faregh, stretches north-eastwards for 80 miles parallel with the coast.

A Battery, under command of Major McDermid, fired a few "harassing" rounds on the following day. Early in the morning three days later the Column were preparing a probe of the enemy positions, with Captain Maurice Gilbert and Captain Robin Dunn [1] out ahead in their carriers to observe.

Suddenly a heavy concentration of enemy fire came down on the Column's front. It had continued for an hour when some 40 enemy tanks—not Italian, but Panzers Mark III and IV—appeared 4000 yards away, advancing in a semi-circle accompanied by troop carriers. Within 15 minutes the tanks had reached the spot where Gilbert and Dunn had halted.

The two officers came in under machine-gun fire and the Battery began a fighting withdrawal "according to plan". The phrase, used to cover many an unpremeditated scamper out of tough situations, was in this case precisely true, but the plan had by no means envisaged the task of getting guns into and out of action in a sea of soft sand.

Before long D Troop had three of their four gun tractors stuck fast and were using their winches to try and haul out. As soon as he had fired his first round Lieut. J. L. F. ("Slogger") Armitage found his gun would neither traverse nor run up. The Battery Commander ordered him to remove the dial sight and breech block and leave the gun. While he was doing so the gun was hit repeatedly, but the detachment got back, on a tractor that had freed itself, with hardly a scratch.

OPPOSITE

TOP, LEFT : *Capt. K. E. Bolton (11 Regt.) (before El Alamein. Photo taken by Capt. S. A. G. Watt, killed on the following day).*

TOP, RIGHT : *Capt. J. P. Sworder (11 Regt.).*

LOWER, LEFT : *Lieut. E. E. N. Causton (Adjutant, 12 Regt.).*

LOWER, RIGHT : *Major H. Bourne (11 Regt.)*(k).

Now a second gun was in trouble. As it fired the platform bent in the soft sand; tie-bars broke; one or two rounds and it was almost buried. One tyre punctured by a machine-gun bullet, it had become unmanageable despite desperate efforts by the detachment, with Armitage and Lieut. Quentin Drage lending a hand and the tractor boiling furiously, to winch it clear. While they struggled the gun was hit again. Geoffrey Armstrong, the Battery Captain, having fetched up Battery Sergeant Major F. E. Dodds to take back the detachment, now put C Troop into action, while the remainder of D Troop retired through them, to come into action two miles back.

As the Battery Commander arrived he found officers vying with the men in serving C Troop's guns—Lieut. Peter Mills in one of the layers' seats; Major Benson, full of courage and warlike spirit, also "having a go". He sent them both back to their jobs. By the time D Troop had brought their two guns into action again the enemy had halted, probably to refuel; but single tanks moved round either flank, shooting up C Troop's guns from both sides.

Brigadier Vallentin was there with a cheery greeting: "We're doing fine. Just keep the Hun off another hour or so and Support Group H.Q., Rear Divisional H.Q. and B Echelon will be clear of sandhills. Then we can go for 20 miles without stopping."

Still under machine-gun fire, Gilbert and Dunn continued their comments round by round, their voices coming over the wireless clear and cheerful; but after three-quarters of an hour of it every gun in C Troop had its platform so twisted and buckled that the gun-wheels would not stay on it. Disregarding their useless platforms, they carried on with indirect fire till the enemy's main body advanced again, and the Battery Commander ordered a "leap-frog" retirement through D Troop.

Three guns only could make the move. The fourth, deeply embedded, defied the efforts of its tractor to winch it out. While the detachment wrestled with it, machine-gun bullets showered both gun and tractor, piercing the buffer and recuperator and setting the tractor in flames. Once again the Battery Commander had to order sights and breech block to be removed.

OPPOSITE

11 Regiment Officers

LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP: *R. L. Trapnell, G. N. P. C. de Boinville, G. Buchanan.*
CENTRE: *T. F. Butler-Stoney*(k), *Mervyn Boys*(k), *B. H. S. Laskey*(k).
BOTTOM: *E. Dudley-Smith, Robin Smith, L. Chrimes.*

As the detachment retired in the fitters' truck, Major McDermid's Morris received its second puncture. Gunner Forster had already changed one wheel in record time, mending the puncture with the last remaining rubber solution. Again he came to the rescue with Gunner Moore, despite a jack that sank constantly in the sand, and enabled the Battery Commander, catching up with the retiring C Troop, to take charge of D, where Gilbert and Dunn were putting in an indirect shoot.

It seemed to halt the enemy. For half an hour his tanks were silent. There came instead wave after wave of Stukas, flying low. A patch of fires behind them told the Battery that they had found a mark.

Now, after five hours of fighting, word came from the Commanding Officer that the Support Group echelons were well away. The Battery were to come back and keep going. Again the enemy tanks came on, and again halted. Tractors hooked in and moved back, making no more than 4 miles an hour until, after a mile, the going improved, while Gilbert and Dunn stayed to watch the enemy.

One more bad patch lay ahead, a depression full of soft sand, through which a single winding track offered the only passage. Major McDermid breasted the lip, to find the depression full of bogged transport. Support Group H.Q. were *not* clear. Instead, their vehicles were part of a throng of trucks, infantry carriers and light A.A. guns, some abandoned, some with radiators boiling while sweating men dug and heaved around them. A Battery's guns had just topped the ridge when Captain Dunn joined the Battery Commander to report that the enemy were coming on again. He halted the guns—but as the detachments uncoupled and swung them about, guns and tractors stuck fast. At this moment 18 Stukas swooped down on the mass of stuck transport, while the enemy tanks opened up with machine-gun fire.

A desperate situation; it produced reactions which were anything but despairing: such as the comment of Major "Tommy" Trotter, who had stuck doggedly by the Battery with his two companies of 2 King's Royal Rifle Corps since the withdrawal began. "Well, anyway", he said to the Battery Commander, "thank God we can't go back any more. This is where we fight it out, isn't it?" The answer was a laconic "Yes".

A bomb hit the Battery petrol lorry, sending Lance-Bombardier Colwell and Bombardier Harris skyhigh in a blazing mass. Lance-

Sergeant Judd and others leaped on them with blankets, extinguishing the flames. (Colwell died, but Harris survived.) Fifteen minutes interval, and the Stukas were at it again, their silvery swaying bombs screaming down till they rocked the earth in deafening "crumps", sending pillars of dust and smoke hundreds of feet high, filling the air with whistling splinters and volleys of stones.

The smoke cleared, revealing the harvest of fires and mutilation. C and D Troops could be seen in action again, firing over open sights at hull-down enemy tanks now attacking from three sides of the depression. Two guns of C Troop, one of D, were hit, buffers, traversing and elevating gears put out of action, dial sights were shattered; still, marvellously, nobody among the detachments more than snicked with bullets.

Ordering Mills and Armitage to get away the two remaining guns, Major McDermid made a determined effort to get the three battered pieces clear. Two tractors, overheated in the struggle, caught fire. There was nothing for it but to abandon all three, minus breech blocks and what remained of their sights, while the detachments got away in the 3-ton ammunition lorries.

The Battery's two remaining guns, one per Troop now, were already in action again; Gilbert and Dunn, still cheerful, doing indirect shoots round 180 degrees. Once more the enemy inexplicably halted while another Stuka raid completed the destruction in the morass of sand.

Then the sudden desert darkness fell. The Battery, what was left of them—two guns, three 8-cwt. trucks, two Bren carriers, three tractors and four 3-tonners—had covered 45 miles before they leaguered for the night. Three officers—Lieuts. M. W. G. Wathen, George Buchanan and P. R. Poland—were missing, together with Battery Sergeant Major Dodds and some 50 men. By the time they rejoined, three days later, they had adventures to recount.

Whether Rommel intended his sally to be merely a reconnaissance in force may never be known. Probably when he set out he did not know himself; but, true to form, he had seized with both hands each opportunity that presented itself.

When Operation Crusader had spent itself it had left him free to choose the line behind which he would re-form. It faced an area as big as Devonshire, comprising everything that is most devilish in desert terrain. The twisting alleyways between sand basin and salt marsh, which Rommel knew by now like the lanes round his home, had to be reconnoitred afresh by the columns who, coming straight into action after their 700-mile desert journey, were trying to probe his defences. No wonder, then, that as Baron Column fought and floundered their way back, German Panzers had outstripped them and were pounding 2 Armoured Brigade to the north between Saunnu and Antelat, and thrusting against 201 Guards Brigade who defended the coastal road.

So A Battery's fight was not yet over. As the Column plugged northward towards sunset on 23 January Captain Dunn, ever watching to rearwards, warned the Commanding Officer that the enemy was coming in again.

A Battery swiftly turned into action, ranging alongside a South African 25-pounder troop on a ridge near Saunnu to face some 36 enemy tanks, moving slowly forward hull down with the sun behind them. One gun—whether A Battery's or a South African no survivor can remember—opened up at too great a range, prematurely disclosing the position.

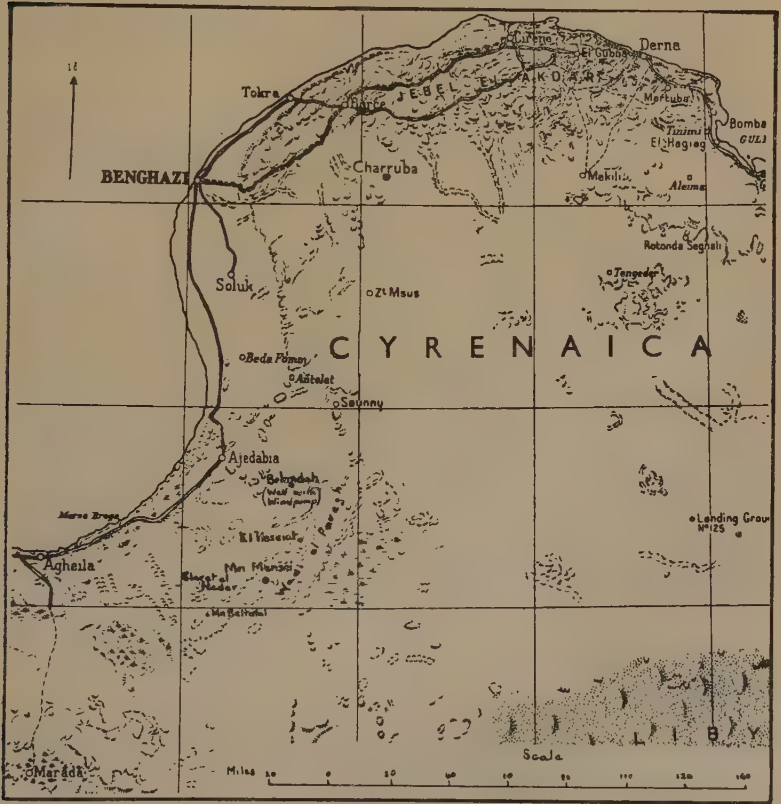
Promptly enemy machine-gun fire was concentrated on the guns, to which every officer within reach had hastened, headed by the Commanding Officer who directed fire. Major McDermid, on in front with the column, turned as he heard the firing and drove at speed towards the guns, picking up a quad full of ammunition, but before he could reach them the 10-minute action was over.

C Troop's gun, under Sergeant J. R. Wraight, had fired barely half a dozen rounds when it was wrecked by a burst of machine-gun fire. Lieut. Peter Mills got into the layer's seat to see what he could make of it, and was at once seriously wounded. 2/Lieut. Bill Hart asked the Colonel what he could do and was sent across to the South African Troop. He had hardly reached them before he was badly hit. (He died that night.)

As the enemy tanks closed in, supporting each other with fire and movement, sweeping the position with their machine-guns, D Troop's gun—A Battery's last gun—carried on. One by one the detachment were killed or wounded. Sergeant Town, the Number One, was hit—mortally, it was thought. (Actually he fell alive into enemy hands and died, as the result of his wounds, as a prisoner—but not before he had learned that his gallantry had earned him the Military Medal.)

Lieuts. Armitage and Drage removed the dead and dying. Gunner Sobanja had his arm shot off. Captain Dunn was hit in the side—not seriously. Bombardier Cramer received a fearful head wound. (He, too, was thought to be dead, and for months was in hospital as a prisoner of war before being repatriated.) Gunner R. H. Taylor drove the Troop quad up and was killed as he reached the gun. Bombardier Leishman, laying, had his hand severely shattered. "Slogger" Armitage took his place.

AGHEILA


Tokra
Cirene
El Gubba
Derna
JEBEL EL AKDAR
Barce
Martuba
Bomba
GULF
Tmimi
El Hagiag
BENGHAZI
Charruba
Mekili
Aleima
Rotonda Segnali
Tengeder
Soluk
Zt Msus
CYRENAICA
Beda Fomm
Antelat
Saunny
Ajedabia
Belandah
(Well with Windpump)
Marsa Brega
El Haseiat
Agheila
Bir Mansour
Giof el Matar
Bir Bettafal
Landing Ground No 125
LIBYA
Marada
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10
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120
140

A moment later he too was hit. Turning to Major Benson, Second-in-Command of the Regiment, who, with Lieut. Drage, was lending a hand, he said "Sorry, Major, I'm no good now. I can't feel my legs. Anyway, the telescope's gone". Benson and Drage lifted him out of the layer's seat (he died that night) and carried on fighting the gun. It had been hit several times. The sights were shot away. They aimed squinting along the piece. They could neither elevate nor traverse it; but they got off several rounds of H.E., all armour piercing shell having been expended.

At the very end of the action Captain Gilbert came up with his truck. Leaving it 400 yards back he walked over to rally the South African gun detachments and had hardly reached them when his leg was shot away. (He lay in hospital in Italy for several months; then was repatriated.)

With both guns smashed beyond repair, Colonel Ebbels ordered all survivors to withdraw. They had not lost their guns for nothing. Five enemy tanks had been destroyed.

As they fired their last rounds, Benson and Drage each got a bullet in the leg. They crawled towards an ammunition lorry about to move off. Before they reached it, a direct hit sent it up in flames. They dropped in their tracks as a group of enemy tanks breasted the ridge and ran down the line of shattered guns, spraying them with bullets. They passed within three yards of the two figures sprawling in the sand, leaving them for dead. But they were not dead. They, too, had adventures to come.

Close behind the burning lorry that Benson and Drage had just, luckily, failed to reach, a neat repair job was going on. Major McDermid had got that far with his truck and his ammunition trailer—remember, the action was begun and over in 10 minutes—when Robin Dunn arrived on his carrier, wounded himself and with several other wounded, Bombardier Leishman among them. He told the Battery Commander both guns had been knocked out and the Colonel had ordered everybody back.

McDermid took Leishman into his truck, which then refused to start.

Calmly as though he was doing a maintenance job on Salisbury Plain, Gunner Forster got out his toolbox and started looking for the electrical fault. Gunner Dorell drove Robin Dunn's carrier into the back of the truck and shoved it.

As it started, the track rod came off. The front wheels splayed out and the truck ground to a standstill. Forster, still undismayed, set about the job again. In five minutes, which seemed an hour, he got the track rod back on the ball-and-socket joint and secured it with telephone wire.

Seven hours after the action began, the Battery Commander was able to rejoin the Column on their northward trek. It led along the ridge of a winding escarpment. Here and there, wadis cut through the hillside.

In pitch dark the Column stumbled forward, snatching, in a brief halt, a couple of hours' sleep. As they moved on, the Battery Commander's track rod came off once more. Once more, in the dark, Forster tied it in place.

An unexplained halt brought Major McDermid to the head of the Column. Two carriers had dropped 40 feet over the escarpment into a not-so-dry river bed. Half an hour's winching and they were out. Then Gunner Chouffot[2] drove one wheel of his quad over the edge. Down the whole lot went—tractor and two trailers; another hour's work. Gunner Forster was found in the Battery Commander's car, balanced on its crank case with both wheels hanging over a 30-foot drop. The track rod had come off again.

For four days the retreat continued, a game of blind man's buff among the sandhills. Strange as it appears in retrospect, it seemed equally fantastic to those who took part that six columns at least, pressing roughly north on parallel lines—the British heading for the Akhdar foothills, where the Divisional Commander contemplated making a stand; the Germans intent on intercepting and crushing them—should have clashed so seldom.

Often it was touch and go. As dawn broke on 24 January tracer bullets streamed from a depression close to A Battery's line of march. Swiftly as it had arisen, the alert died down. An officer of the K.R.R.C., with half a dozen vehicles, had driven right through a German leaguer, intact except for a bullet through the crown of his Herbert Johnson hat.

Many times in that march the Column were saved from capture or destruction by the vigilance of the lookouts on the flanks and in rear; a task shared by the Battery Commander, Robin Dunn (despite a wound that grew hourly more painful) and Geoffrey Armstrong who, his journey interspersed with a heartbreaking series of punctures, had at last rejoined the Battery.

For gunners the task was exasperating: to have targets galore, and no guns to bring down fire on them. It was also risky. The armoured cars of the advancing enemy's screen were swift movers and quick on the draw.

Typical of the day's incidents was the moment when reports from McDermid, Armstrong and Dunn told Lieut.-Colonel

Ebbels that he was surrounded. On the left a large column of German tanks was moving parallel to his own course. Ahead, to left and right, enemy columns were too close for comfort; behind, occasional bursts of fire reminded all concerned of the force still advancing in their wake.

Like a ship's skipper dodging collisions in a crowded waterway, Ebbels, quite unflurried, slowed his column down, put his helm over another 10 degrees—and slipped through. Skirting the northward edge of the great salt lake below Msus, Baron Column entered on the final stage of the retirement.

At that moment Geoffrey Armstrong's truck, bringing up the rear like the guard's van of a train, received not one, but two punctures. It was a grim outlook: spare tyre gone; repair outfit spent; car nestling down on its back axle, completely untowable; a sitting target if ever there was one.

The Battery Commander's voice was heard on the wireless asking if Armstrong needed help. There was no time to reply, for across the sand at this juncture came a Dodge truck with German markings, going strong. As an armoured warrior of old, dismounted, fought an enemy knight for his horse, Armstrong determined to have that truck. Down on the sand went the Bren gun. Before it could loose a round the Dodge driver, touching his German cap as he leaned out of the cab, enquired "Taxi, Captain?"

It was George Buchanan. With some deliberation the truck load was transferred to the Dodge. Only when armoured cars appeared over a not-too-distant crest did the need for urgency manifest itself. "Ours", said Armstrong. "Indeed?" replied Buchanan. "Then what are these?" as machine-gun bullets phutted into the sand.

Once clear of these undesirable attentions they stopped for a meal. It was a bit risky, but George was hungry.

Three days back, when the action began, Buchanan, Wagon Line Officer, had his head in the bonnet of a tractor. Gunner H. L. Truscott and "Shoey" Wright were busy at his side, tinkering with a broken fan belt. George took his head out of the bonnet and was annoyed to find himself confronted by three German armoured cars. All he had was a pair of pliers. Wright and Truscott had not even seen the Germans. There was nothing for it but to "go quietly". (The two other ranks were sent to Italy, but their ship was torpedoed. Wright was drowned. Truscott, a strong swimmer, reached shore and was recaptured.)

George was well treated, and rode in the front seat of a Dodge the enemy had captured. Before they found anybody who spoke English, an officer interrogated him in Italian. He answered in the only Italian he knew: "*E pericoloso sporgersi!*" The officer was livid, suspecting that the caution "It is dangerous to lean out of the window" held, for the English, some hidden double meaning—a special brand of insolent invective.

That night, listening and watching, Buchanan was able to see the method of leaguering, guards, maintenance. He confirmed that he was being held by 15 Panzer Division. Next day they moved off, George being driven on the outside of the "soft" vehicles, with tanks in front and to the flanks. He counted, noted and photographed in his mind the formation in which they moved.

In the afternoon some vehicles got stuck—as George mused with some content "Just like our chaps". The desert rang with the German equivalents of " 'Old it. Wooh! Back a bit. Other lock". George's driver had to get out and ("of course; just like one of us") left the engine ticking over. George took a peep; there was someone watching. A good deal of cursing started.

George glanced back and to the side. Everybody was busy. He slipped into the driver's seat, pulled the gear lever, put his foot hard down and let in the clutch. A large German ran at him. George "handed him off" in the face through the window. There were several shots. Bullets ripped through the cab. George tore off, the truck bumping and swaying.

To his horror he heard the rattle and roar of a machine-gun very close, and presumed he was being chased by tanks. But so few bullets came that he decided to glance back through the cab window. The twin machine-guns in the back of the truck were horizontal, obviously having just fired a burst each; the bumps must have set them off.

George drove east and saw some vehicles moving east too. As they were of English type he joined them, but after a bit realised, by the drivers' caps, that they were captured transport, being driven by Germans. So he popped on the late driver's cap and drove along with them, again counting and noting. Before dark he gradually widened the distance and left them, but had to spend a nervy night pretending he was part of another column leaguering in the darkness.

At first light he drove east like mad. After a while he came upon a man siphoning petrol out of a quad. It was Peter Sworder of B Battery, who put him on to Armstrong's line. This he followed until he saw, dead ahead, a truck and a man on his belly with a Bren gun pointed at George's Dodge. In the nick of time he recognised the man behind the gun and offered his polite salutation.

It was 24 hours after George rejoined that the Battery Commander realised he had been a prisoner. Bit by bit the story was dragged out of him, and he was ordered to make a detailed report. Later the Intelligence staff circulated the account of his adventures. He was recommended for a decoration, but never got it.

Buchanan's was not the only escape. A Rifle Brigade patrol in Bren carriers, sent out from James Column before the fight began to reconnoitre the southernmost edge of the enemy position, found themselves, as the German sortie emerged, well behind the advancing line of enemy tanks. The patrol were given up for lost. Obviously they had been captured; but the obvious, in this fight, was not always the right answer. Taking "avoiding action" out on the right of the German advance, they were nosing their way along the line of the Wadi el Faregh.

Ahead, two solitary Arabs were seen hobbling across the Desert. It was always worth while to question, if you came across them, the odd nomads when they appeared, wandering neutrals, hovering around in the hope of a bit of plunder, always willing, like a random countryman in the Shires, to tell straggling fox-hunters "which way hounds had gone".

The Arabs answered the hail in English. They just could answer, with what voices two parching days had left them. Their Arab robes, now you came to look at them, were verminous blankets tied over tattered uniforms. They introduced themselves as Major J. R. E. Benson and Lieut. L. Q. Drage, H.A.C. A cup of water and a snack of bully and biscuit, and they were able to tell their story.

They had lain quite still when the German armour poured over the ridge. A Battery's wounded were taken up by the Germans' carriers. There was no time, at this moment, for the dead. As the enemy wave passed over they had picked themselves up and hobbled eastwards all night as fast as their wounds would let them.

At dawn they came across a group of Senussi, who fed them, gave them blankets and set them on a course which, they said, would bring them to British troops. They were pretty nearly done when the patrol found them. That night they were back with the Regiment.

A sandstorm brought down the curtain on Baron Column's battle. By nightfall they had met their supply echelon some 30 miles south of the Jebel Akhdar; had pushed on into the valley of Charruba.

As they drove into the green hills they saw the answer to the question they had asked so many times: where were the R.A.F.? Rain such as Cyrenaica had rarely known had flooded the Jebel Akhdar just before Rommel's sortie began—a local deluge, turning our advanced landing grounds at Antelat and Saunnu into bogs in which wheels sank hub-deep as the planes touched down. South where the battle had been fought not a drop had fallen; but for three critical days our aircraft had been out of action.

Hardly had the Battery arrived in Charruba when they were switched eastward to Mekili. Here another reunion cheered them. Six 3-tonners appeared, with the gun detachments who had been ordered back as, one by one, their guns were hit or stuck fast, and had wandered eastwards across the Desert—Lieuts. Mark Wathen and Poland, Battery Sergeant Majors Dodds and Eldred, Sergeant Chaplin, and 75 men.

Glum but undaunted, A Battery made their way back to Mersa Matruh, to be fitted out with new guns and transport.

They were crestfallen, without a doubt. All their guns lost, and casualties that could be counted on the fingers. War diaries, and palaver in bivouac and mess, posed again and again the question, Why had the Battery failed? "That we could and should have done better", says one diary, "those who took part—and still survive—will readily admit." Was it inexperience? Had they muffed their job?

The answer which a chronicler can give, surveying 15 years later an action in which he took no part, is that the Battery did not fail. Many of the remoter causes which led to this disaster have already been reviewed. The more immediate ones were threefold: two bad mistakes in generalship; bad luck—and sand.

"Jobbing backwards" (which is far easier to do, as Frederick the Great reminds us, than making instant decisions in battle) two conclusions are patent. The principle of using comparatively weak forces to "lure the enemy on to the tanks" was a bad one. It was a role to which the force's invaluable artillery, the only weapon whose hitting power could match the enemy's tanks, should never have been committed. Their place was with the tanks, for mutual support.

These Jock Columns, moreover, should never have been sent into action with 60 to 100 miles as the crow flies (and tractor-towed guns are not crows) between them and their supports; particularly as those 60 to 100 miles comprised perhaps the worst going to be found in all the Desert.

Bad luck there was in plenty. No general would have sent "harassing forces" a hundred miles ahead, across bogs and sand holes through which he could not reach them, if he had known that a resolute and skilful enemy, thrice as strong as he was reckoned to be, had chosen that moment for a large-scale attack. But Headquarters did not know. Mist and mud had grounded the R.A.F. who otherwise would not have failed—they never had failed before—to give due warning.

Lastly, the old horse artillery tactics—quick advance, quick unlimbering to action front, quick retirement (if such was ordered) to new gun positions—did not work, and no valour and skill could have made them work, in a terrain where 60 horsepower could not do what six horses had, over decent going, so often done.

As to the detachments who, at the last resort, after a plucky fight, left their battered and useless guns behind, no student of military economy would have wished otherwise the firm but reluctant orders which they had to obey. Gunners in the Libyan war were far more difficult to replace than guns.

Despite their diffident, modest post-mortems, such thoughts as these were in the minds of all ranks. Sore but not disheartened, the Battery took over the new weapons which would enable them to have another go.

NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

[1] Robin Dunn's father had commanded A Battery in the 1914-18 war. As Brigadier F. K. W. Dunn he commanded the mixed force which, in this war, took over the stronghold of Jebel Druse, in Syria.

[2] Gunner Chouffot was known to all pre-war H.A.C. men as groundsman Dare's assistant at Armoury House.

10. INTO BATTLE—II

January 1942

While A Battery, with Baron Column, were making their ill-starred retirement, B Battery, with James Column, had been engaged in a running fight a few miles south. Their route to their first position lay over sand so soft and shifting that for half the way the guns had to be winched. Vehicles stuck and had to be left behind, but all rejoined eventually except the Q truck and a quad which had been sent to retrieve it. While the rescue party were struggling with it an enemy column appeared and rounded up every man of them—Lieut. Waugh, Sergeant Lacey the Fitter Sergeant, Battery Quartermaster Sergeant Murray and several more.

On 20 January the guns were in position. O.P.s were sent forward, with escorts of carrier-borne infantry and anti-tank portees, to "the Pimples", a group of rocky outcrops about five miles west. They were attacked by Stukas but there were no casualties. Next morning Major Linton, commanding the Battery, set out to reconnoitre a way ahead. Every quad that had petrol was used to haul the guns forward.

F Troop fired their first rounds at a mass of vehicles moving along the escarpment in a cloud of dust. The range, opening at 12,000 yards, shortened till Captain J. W. Hopkins, who was doing O.P., ordered "gun control—open sights". Several direct hits were scored, and that night the wireless intercept at Corps H.Q. picked up many lamentations from Germans whose supply vehicles had been mauled.

The enemy, nevertheless, pressed on with their mobile anti-tank guns, armoured cars and tanks, till they were within 1200 yards. It was clear to Major Linton that this was a counter-attack in far greater strength than anything Headquarters had envisaged.

He ordered the guns back 20 miles. As the echelons withdrew each troop in turn fought their way back safely and in good order, though the enemy was now bringing down heavy counter-battery fire. The Battery continued firing till all the ammunition at the gun positions had been expended; the last gun devoting its last five rounds to a mobile anti-tank gun which was trying to sneak round the flank.

The withdrawal was far stickier than the advance had been. While radiators burst under their steam pressure, bogged guns were winched clear. (One Number One said he had winched practically all the way for 12 miles.)

It was a day when the fitter came into his own. Throughout the withdrawal Staff-Sergeant-Fitter A. Goodman, with Lance-Bombardier Bach, E Troop's motor mechanic, calmly set about soldering radiators. As the guns reached the Column leaguer a Stuka raid provided them with a wider variety of jobs. The first wave put the two Bofors guns out of action, so the bombers, with their fighter escort, had things their own way. All their bombs away, they circled the leaguer, machine-gunning at 20 feet for what one diary put down as 35 minutes (though a later commentator thinks it only seemed that long). They sent the petrol lorry up in flames, and destroyed several lorries.

Through the night Goodman carried on, as the Germans in the darkness, lit only by the still blazing petrol lorry, closed round the position. Working on F Troop fitters' 3-tonner, he and Bombardier Davies could hear German voices around them discussing the knocked-out vehicles. They had just got the engine started when they found the radiator was beyond repair. By the light of the petrol lorry they removed the radiator from another truck and fitted it in place; started up and reached the leaguer just in time to set off with the Battery.

As the guns moved back at 0400 hours on 22 January, enemy Verey lights shewed all round them. One gun was immovable. It had no tractor. First a 15-cwt., then the fitters' newly arrived 3-tonner struggled to extricate it, and themselves had to be dug out. There was nothing for it but to smash the gun and leave it.

In the move through the dark other vehicles and guns, trying to pick a way for themselves, lost touch. Major Linton drove back to the leaguer site to round them up. It was full of Germans, who made him a prisoner. (When Italy surrendered he made a fine escape through the German lines, joined 1 Airborne Division and won the D.S.O. at Arnhem.)

Surprised to find James Column still extant, Division ordered them back to Saunnu. Several times during the ensuing days they were surrounded, exchanging shots with German columns in occasional brushes. Once, at "Well with windpump" near Belandah, they drove in and out of a German leaguer in the dusk.

Fog, darkness, luck and clever guidance by Captain Hopkins, who had taken over the command, brought them at last in touch with Brigadier Vallentin and the remainder of the Support Group. Astonishingly, the Battery suffered no casualties, though other units of James Column were not so fortunate.

There was one grim moment, on the edge of the salt lake, when, with German enemy flares closing round, it looked as if they would finish the journey to the Green Mountains on foot. Petrol had run out. A desperate raiding party set out to see if a known dump was still in existence. They returned with petrol—and an astonished German sentry.

Still there was not enough to go round. Draining the tanks, they filled what vehicles they could with petrol for 50 miles. The rest they burned, loading their crews on to the few vehicles they were able to salve. Leapfrogging their guns, they covered their retreat through clouds of choking dust till at last the exhausted drivers halted in the green valley of Charruba, where their six remaining guns were put into action again.

To the unbounded joy of the parched gunners, they found a stream behind their position—clear water except for tiny red insects; the best they had known since they left the Delta. For months it became a byword in the Regiment whenever there was a specially good brew: "Charruba water."

A few days later a composite B/E Battery were formed, surplus personnel being drafted on loan to 2 R.H.A.

11. INTO BATTLE—III

January 1942

As the improvised column to which E Battery had been allotted halted at Mn Mensci, orders came that only the anti-tank element would advance, owing to the bad going. The rest of Charles Column would relieve Baron Column in a week's time. By 1100 hours on 20 January, however, news had come through that A Battery had been badly mauled. Half an hour later B Echelon arrived with much needed petrol—and a huge batch of air- and sea-borne mail.

There was precious little time for reading letters, for by noon the Battery were on their way forward to cover A's withdrawal. Ten miles on they took up their position, with H Troop comfortably sited on a patch of hard ground which, for once, had a name—Claret en Nedar.

They had hardly come into action when Lieut. M. V. Boys in the Battery Commander's armoured O.P. spotted a rapidly advancing enemy column. He opened fire at 5000 yards, but had only got off a few rounds when the order came for Charles Column to retire another seven miles along the centre line. It took a few hectic minutes to drag G Troop out of the soft sand.

As the Battery moved off 20 enemy tanks appeared on a crest 3000 yards in rear, and started shelling the Column—now a scattered array of lorries, trucks, anti-tank gun portees, Bofors anti-aircraft guns bouncing behind their six-wheel tractors, hundreds of vehicles stretching away for miles across the falling ground towards a narrow defile, the only practicable way between two stretches of shifting sand.

Before the Battery reached the defile the earth seemed to erupt as Stukas bombed the converging vehicles ahead. A blinding flash

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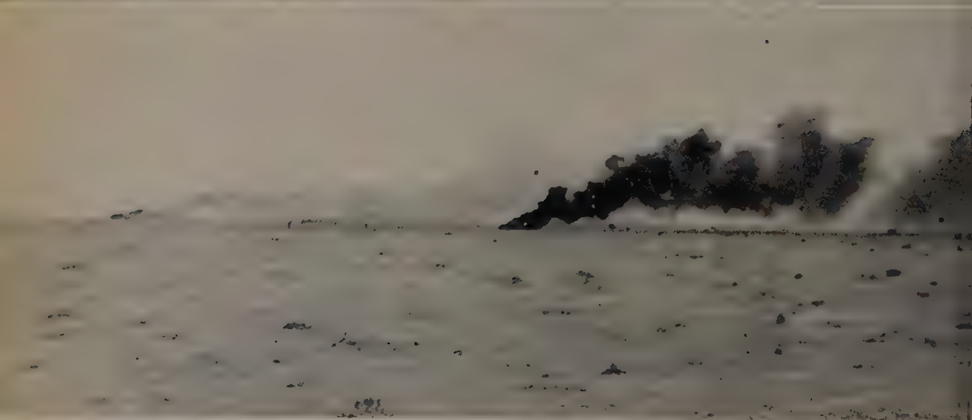
OPPOSITE

BON VOYAGE

LEFT TO RIGHT, UPPER: *John Venning*(k), *"Pom" Colley, Colin Leechman*(k).

CENTRE, BACK: *Quentin Drage*(k), *Maurice Gilbert, Robin Dunn, Tom Butler-Stoney*(k), *Mervyn Boys*(k), *H. C. Henchman, Bill Hart*(k), *Sam Hobson, Brian Maclaren.* FRONT: *Leycester Bedwell, Roger Croxton, Ron Norwood, John McDermid.*

LOWER: *John Charles, Alan Watt*(k), *Robin Dunn.*



followed by a red glow and a pillar of black smoke shewed where a petrol lorry, right in the middle of the defile, had been hit. Other vehicles riddled with holes lay abandoned, their crews clambering on passing trucks.

As the smoke cleared, a mass of stationary vehicles could be seen beyond the dune, the Red Cross flag flying over the tents of a Casualty Clearing Station whose ambulances were standing by to withdraw. It was obvious that much of this M.T. would be destroyed or captured if the tanks came on, so H Troop swung into action again.

To avoid the defile, now nearly blocked with battered vehicles, Lieut. J. P. Thomson-Glover led G Troop's guns further south, hoping to find another way through. A hail of 50-mm. armour-piercing shell from the tanks greeted the attempt.

Guns were ordered to find their own way across the dunes—and did, all but one. Hopelessly bogged, it resisted all attempts to move it, though Lieut. Boys, under heavy fire, gallantly tried to tow it away with his carrier. There was nothing for it but to leave the piece, minus sights, breech block and firing mechanism, which the sub-section got away in their quad.

Meanwhile Major Croxton had threaded his way through the gap to warn B Echelon commander and Captain Bedwell, the Regimental Quartermaster, who were waiting without any orders behind the C.C.S., to get clear with their vehicles. Returning, he gave Lieut. Venning, G.P.O. H. Troop, the order, just received from Colonel Ebbels, to withdraw. The Battery Commander himself led three guns back. The fourth missed the way in the turmoil and, slewing south, was badly bogged. Lieut. Venning remained under continuous H.E. and machine-gun fire, fighting the gun. Several times the piece was hit, but not until all visible trucks had got through the gap did Venning withdraw; and an excellent piece of driving by Bombardier-Mechanic Lewis, straight over the dune, brought the gun back without a casualty.

Now there was a new phase in this tactical puzzle, for as Major Croxton with his three guns moved back a mile to take up another

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OPPOSITE KNIGHTSBRIDGE

TOP: *Our tanks. Enemy "brews" in background.*

Blockhouse north of Knightsbridge box (see page 80).

Second day of the battle. German trucks caught by our shell fire.

E Battery passing knocked-out German Mk. III tanks.

covering stand, the German tanks drew off, heading due north. Probably, knowing the ground better than the newly-arrived British division, they elected to press forward where the going was easier, hoping to mop up the British columns later as they floundered among the almost—but not quite—impassable seas of sand. Their over optimism was destined to cost them dear.

As soon as the German switch was reported, Brigadier Vallentin, who with Major Goodbody was in his armoured command vehicle close behind the new battery position, ordered Major Croxton to carry on with his retirement and rejoin Colonel Sismey and 60 Rifles. Pressing north-eastwards up the ploughed-up, rutted track, E Battery had just reached an awkward defile when the ominous roar of Stukas was heard. Crews from the badly closed-up vehicles dived from their trucks to flatten in sand hollows while the Bofors guns dropped into action.

The tornado of sound—the staccato of the Bofors answering the crash of the falling bombs—was succeeded by a moment of silence broken only by the groans of the wounded and the furious swearing of the Bofors teams, both of whose guns had been put out of action; then another roar of planes as two enemy fighters swooped down spraying the valley with machine-gun fire.

A 3-tonner had joined the Battery as they entered the defile, carrying Lieut. Hew Tompson and 2/Lieut. B. H. S. Laskey and the crews of smashed B Echelon vehicles whom they had rescued. It was riddled with bullets. Tompson was badly hit. Laskey's driver, Gunner Hill, was killed. Every man in the lorry except Laskey was wounded, including B.S.M. Hopson, a great loss to the unit; and there were several casualties among the Bofors detachments. A bomb had fallen within 15 feet of the Battery Commander and his crew, but they emerged untouched from the cloud of smoke and sand and splinters.

The wounded were loaded into vehicles; Major Benson picked up Hew Tompson who, however, died that night. Venning with H Troop's guns and detachments escaped untouched, though Sergeant Cone's gun was put out of action and the quad wrecked. Joining Baron Column in leaguer that night, the Battery snatched what sleep they could while the darkness was lit by green Verey lights from German leaguers all around, and occasional flashes in the distance followed by showers of sparks and a red glow as the Germans blew up some wrecked ammunition vehicle.

Such news as liaison officers from Support Group had to tell was gloomy but vague. The Guards Brigade were falling back before a strong enemy thrust along the coast, but what was the enemy doing burning captured vehicles instead of salving them, as was his wont, to eke out his own hard-pressed transport?

Before dawn, Captains J. V. C. Pearson and W. P. Colley set out towards the enemy in their O.P. trucks, with infantry carrier escorts and a section of anti-tank guns, to see what was going on. The Battery meanwhile were to move back 15 miles to take a covering position on high ground.

Once more a patch of deep soft sand barred their way. Each sub-section wallowed through independently with digging, winching and much cursing, when suddenly, over a crest some 2000 yards west, a squadron of tanks appeared in a cloud of dust. "Action—target tanks" was given. The detachments dropped their spades and swung the guns, tensely awaiting the order to fire. The tanks came rushing on, but did not open fire. As they closed to 1500 yards the Battery Commander recognised them as Honeys. Just as he shouted "Stand Fast!", Venning, impetuous as usual, let fly a round.

"It was very amusing", says the B.C.'s diary, "to see the immediate effect on the tank drivers. As one man the twelve or so hauled on the sticks to stop in their tracks." Venning's round exploded to the right of the leader. No recognition signals had been made, and the B.C. had a somewhat tense argument with the infuriated squadron leader, Lord Cranley of 4 County of London Yeomanry.

Three or four times, in their new position, the Battery echelons were bombed from the air in the wadis near El Haseiat, and once there was a heavy machine-gun attack; the only resulting casualty being a bullet through one petrol tank of the armoured car in which Lieut.-Colonel Sismey was sitting.

Fresh orders came late in the afternoon. A large enemy force was moving round to outflank Charles Column from the south. The Battery were to move north to Belandah to support the Guards as they fell back towards Antelat.

Colley and Pearson were recalled from their reconnaissance, a guide being left at the old position to bring them on. Owing to a mistake he came on with Colley alone, leaving Pearson to find the Battery as best he could. Both he and Boys were still missing when the Battery leaguered for the night.

Once again, before dawn, the Battery changed course, as a South African armoured car patrol drove up with the news that German tanks, having outflanked the Guards, were already attacking Antelat. All the columns, plus the Guards Brigade, with whom contact had been made, were to make for Msus to defend the invaluable supply dumps there.

Descending from their ridge the Battery ran into a dense mist. Visibility was reduced to a few yards. Only with the aid of Venning's hunting horn, ringing out merrily through the fog of war, were the Battery kept together. Down on the plain burnt-out British tanks told of the unequal battle which 2 Armoured Brigade's Crusaders and Honeys had just fought, outgunned and outranged by the hard-hitting guns of the German Panzers.

A melancholy journey, full of mysterious alarms. The Battery had hardly halted to brew up when they were suddenly shelled by a self-propelled gun. Major Croxton raced off to spot it and managed to get a couple of rounds too close for its comfort. It made off north into dead ground.

Before the Column could set off again there was fierce firing to the north; then, after twenty minutes, silence. It was A Battery's two remaining guns, firing their last rounds.

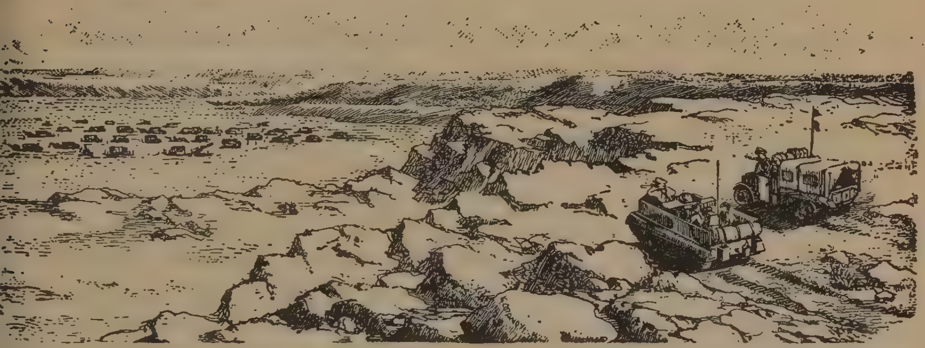
Support Group Headquarters were now in trouble. E Battery switched again, heading north-east to their aid. As dusk fell it did not need messages from Support Group to tell they were surrounded by enemy columns. From all points of the compass parachute flares lit windscreens and men's faces with an eerie green light.

To stay was to invite disaster in the morning. Lieut.-Colonel Sismey ordered a night march to join Support H.Q. As the orders passed round pandemonium broke out a few miles away; Brens and Bofors, field and anti-tank guns joined in a terrific fusillade. It died out as suddenly as it had begun, leaving the Battery guessing.

Just before midnight the Column set out in close formation, 12 lines of eight or nine vehicles head to tail, five yards apart, plugging along at five miles an hour, with noise enough—the roar of engines in low gear, the squeak of the carrier tracks—to be heard for miles. A bogged Hurricane loomed out of the darkness. This was Saunnu airfield, then; and *that* was the reason why the Battery had received no R.A.F. support.

Soon the Column would reach the wadis that led down to the flat Saunnu basin. It came earlier than they expected; the head of the Column was peering over a 30-ft. drop. A way down was found, vehicles slithering over slopes of stony gravel; but there was no way out—just a sheer wall of overhanging rock. For 20 minutes the Column halted, at the mercy of any force that appeared on the wadi edge, while a reconnaissance party searched in vain. There was nothing for it but to climb back the way they had come.

They reached the plain at last, skimming the edge of an enemy leaguer—but without a challenge. Drivers, exhausted with peering through the darkness, fell asleep as they touched ground.



(Drawn by Major R. C. Croxton)

"Can you see what I see?"

In the half light of dawn they climbed to a commanding position on the farther ridge. Suddenly the excited voice of Thomson-Glover came over the air from the forward observation post. "Hullo, One Three. Can you see what I see? Over." The Battery Commander replied "Yes. Wait".

What they saw was a gunner's dream. Four thousand yards due west, and again some 7000 yards south-west were two large German leaguers. The nearer one held a dozen tanks, a field battery drawn by half-track tractors, anti-tank guns and about 50 lorries, many of them captured British vehicles. Indeed, there were so many of these that for the moment the Battery Commander was uncertain whether the column was British or German. Doubt on this point was resolved by an enterprising subaltern of the K.R.R.C., who drove to within 500 yards of it and, when shot at, stood up in his carrier waving a red flag.

Clearly the columns had no idea hostile troops were about in any strength, for some hundred men were gathered, unconcerned, round a lorry drawing rations. As the Battery were reduced to 400 rounds of ammunition, Major Croxton asked the Column Commander whether he might open fire, risking a possible attack from this column and the even larger one further down the valley. The Brigadier came up and promised further ammunition supplies and the Battery Commander joyfully passed the word "Hallo, Three One. Go on. Watch ammunition. Over".

"O.K. Off." In a few minutes Thomson-Glover had bracketed the target and was banging rounds of gunfire into the midst of the vehicles.

Men dived helter-skelter from the ration lorry to their vehicles, many falling on the way as 25-pounder high explosive burst among them. Vehicles drove in all directions, the tanks and guns peeling off in single file down a deep wadi. Leaving three or four lorries burning, others abandoned, an anti-tank gun disabled, the scattered column dived into dead ground or became obscured by smoke.

Major Croxton, taking over, turned his exultant gunners on to the more distant column, which had by now begun to take notice. As ranging rounds burst near, vehicles began to form up and head south. Rounds of gunfire burst among them, stopping a few for good. One battery came into action, fired one round and, finding things too hot, made off after the retreating column.

For some hours targets appeared in all parts of the basin and on the high ground to the west. The Battery took them all on, slewing the line of fire round 150 degrees. On one occasion the command post was in front of the widely spaced guns. By noon the whole enemy force had withdrawn, leaving only a self-propelled gun which sporadically shelled the rear of the Battery, and defied the gunners' efforts to catch it.

Dive bombers came over; but the Battery held their fire and the planes failed to spot them, passing on to bomb the echelon. One lorry was hit and a few men wounded. Months later 2 K.R.R.C. captured some Germans who had been in the leaguer which was first shot up. They said they had had 200 casualties.

The Battery's jubilation at this encouraging brush with the enemy was sternly dispelled that afternoon. Those British vehicles they had shelled were their own, captured a few hours earlier in an ambush which had taken a severe toll of Charles Column's B Echelon. The grim news was brought by Lieuts. J. H. McAllum and Laskey.

The whole Echelon, just about to thread their way out of the Saunnu Basin through a narrow wadi, had been caught in a torrent of machine-gun, anti-tank and rifle fire from the cliffs on either side. Several vehicles were knocked out at once. Others, jammed among them, could move neither backward nor forward. A few managed, by desperate driving, to scale the wadi's steep side.

Fifty-four vehicles were trapped; their occupants killed or captured. E Battery alone lost some 70 men, including Sergeants Straiton (he died as a prisoner of war), Higgs, Harvey and Neave; with three quads, five 15-cwt. trucks, the Signal trucks, one 3-tonner and the water truck; also the canteen stores and cash and the officers' mess equipment.

Msus, on which Charles Column were to have retired, was already in enemy hands. Skirting it; leaguering with six enemy leaguers around them, they reached Charruba. Several missing officers and men rejoined them there, including Captain Colley and his crew, and Captain Pearson and Lieut. Boys, who owed their escape to the determination of Bombardier F. G. Gilbert. It earned him the Military Medal.

He had unditched four vehicles from deep sand under shell and machine-gun fire. His own carrier broke down. While repairing it he was wounded, but he continued his work—sitting on his wound—for six hours and got the carrier going. He had to travel for the next three days lying on his stomach; but he got back to the Battery undaunted.

12. RECONSTRUCTION—I

January—March 1942

For nine days the remnants of B and E Batteries were merged; till, in the "Happy Valley" near Sidi Muftah, they were re-formed with fresh guns and vehicles. Major Benson took over B Battery; Captain Armstrong relieving him as Second-in-Command. One more casualty marked the first phase of 11 Regiment's ill-fated introduction to battle, when Corporal C. Fell was killed by the bursting of an unexploded shell.

A battery of Royal Horse Artillery is more than 200 odd men, with eight guns and the vehicles which tow and maintain and supply them. It is not a fighting unit until every man knows his gun or his vehicle or his wireless set, its needs and its waywardness, as intimately as a happy husband knows the features and the moods of a loving wife. So for three months there was no more battle for 11 Regiment—except one small, brief, bloody and disastrous one, which shall be recorded in due time.

The new guns had to be studied and coaxed and, when they proved too troublesome for gunners to handle, sent back one by one to their mother, the Ordnance Depot, for adjustment. Every man had to learn the ways of his battery's pieces, lest once again the gun detachments should be shot down. Batmen and cooks and specialists of all trades became gunners too, and were in due time to prove their mettle: such men as Bombardier G. T. A. Knight, E Battery's cook, who, serving his gun as a Number One in a later battle, won the Military Medal.

Lessons so grimly learnt in the Regiment's first fight were noted against the next: a smaller load for the 3-tonners; they would no longer be so easily bogged. Every leaf of every spring was taken down, greased and replaced bound in scrim, to reduce breakages from dust and sand.

The British Commander had extricated his forces from the tempting green valleys of the Barce bulge. From Benghazi, where they had waited to ensure the destruction of stores and the evacuation of the port, 7 Indian Brigade had smashed their way through an encircling Italian column, and rejoined their Division virtually intact.

Rommel, his rearward services working with masterly precision and speed, was already getting tanks fast through the port, beside those landed for him in far-off Tripoli. Driving in our rearguards he probed towards the Gazala line, where General Ritchie intended to make a stand. He held Mekili. He held Tmimi, an obscure coastal settlement whose name dwells in regimental memory in a quaint way.

An officer of 9 Lancers had found himself marooned there and was asking by radio for directions. "Where are you?" headquarters asked. Cagily, and with an evident acquaintance with both "La Bohème" and crossword puzzles, he had replied "I am at tea with a French girl".

Now Rommel gathered three columns, more than 100 tanks, for a fresh thrust. For two days he harried the outposts—and suddenly withdrew. War historians have been much concerned to discover why. Probably—and E Battery had cause to cherish the theory—the swift advent of our airmen had again changed the course of battle.

Three days before the thrust began, 1 Armoured Division, rejoicing in the return of General Lumsden after his wound, had set out on an exercise of unprecedented magnitude. Strung out in open order, the mass of guns, tanks and vehicles formed a column several miles in depth. As E Battery's section of this great movement passed the lonely well of Bir Harmat 30 Italian CR42 planes dived on the column. Two petrol lorries were in flames before the troops flung their reply into the air.

Suddenly the din rose in a crescendo as 18 Australian Kittyhawks swooped out of the clouds on the tails of the Italians. With whoops of joy the Battery watched three Italians crash into the sand in a column of flame and smoke: but that was only the first sample. Twenty Italians were brought down before the Kittyhawks called off their pursuit.

It is not unlikely that Rommel, whose weak spot at that time was his air cover, held up a mass attack which, had it come in February, might have won him the complete break-through which was denied him three months later.

So 11 Regiment resumed their exercises. To their joy, the Batteries renewed their old regimental groupings: A Battery rejoining the Queen's Bays, B linked with 10 Hussars. E Battery's comrade regiment, 9 Lancers, had been sent back, however, to refit at Sidi Rezegh.

13. H TROOP'S STAND

March 1942

Thus, when a troop was called for to support a Free French column operating west of Bir Hacheim, E Battery, now for the moment a spare unit, were ordered to send H Troop, with one gun from G Troop to replace one under repair. With Captain Colley on ahead, reconnoitring a route through our defensive minefield at Rotunda Segnali, Lieuts. Venning and Sewell led their guns and vehicles towards the French, and on 14 March 1942 the Troop joined their new comrades round Mekili.

Two days later Venning had his men early at work, testing sights and generally preparing for an evening move to a position where they could harass the Italians. Captain Colley, some distance away, was discussing details with Colonel Broche, the French commander.

A Junkers 88 and two 109s flew over the Troop, evidently taking a careful note. Soon afterwards gunfire was heard. Only French gunners practising, thought Venning; but as the sound grew nearer and stronger at 0800 hours he ordered "Prepare for action" and moved with Lieut. Sewell to high ground to investigate.

Five thousand yards to his north-east he saw a number of enemy vehicles moving south. As Venning hurriedly rejoined the Troop, Captain Colley arrived with orders to move to a new position where fire could be brought to bear.

Ten minutes later, when the Troop had only moved a few hundred yards, a fresh force of 15 or 20 tanks appeared over a crest 1500 yards to the west, firing as they came. Venning signalled "Action Left" as shells burst around the Troop.

The gunners could hardly have hit upon a worse spot than the uneven rocky ground where they dropped into action. Once more the enemy adopted the tactics which had time and again cost our unprotected gunners so dear: moving round on either flank till the position, engaged in front, was also enfiladed from both sides.

In a few minutes three guns, firing over open sights, were knocked out by shell fire, and all four had most of their detachments killed or wounded.

Venning, gamely encouraging his gunners, tried with a rifle to shoot the enemy tank commanders until he was killed by a shell burst. Captain Colley, who had gone ahead, rushed back to try and extricate the guns; but three quads were blazing and it was hopeless. French anti-tank gunners tried to cover the Troop with their 75-mm., but the long range made their fire ineffective.

As the tanks, followed by lorried infantry and 105-mm. field guns, rolled over the position, Colley and the survivors shammed dead; rising as they passed to tend the wounded and retrieve the gun sights; but as they moved a J.U. 88 flew low over them and reported their movement. Within a few minutes a German armoured car was upon them, taking them, prisoners, back to Benghazi.

Lieut. Sewell had succeeded in extricating his little A Echelon, to learn, as he joined the French column, that Colonel Broche, when the strong enemy force first appeared, had sent orders to the Troop to withdraw—orders that never reached them.

The Regiment treasure still a letter which General Koenig, commanding the Free French, sent to 1 Armoured Division.

"I have already had the honour of reporting to you", he says, "the heroic conduct displayed in the face of the enemy by Captain Colley's Troop of 11 (H.A.C.) R.H.A., which was attached to one of the Jock Columns of the Free French Group.

"This troop was engaged without warning on the morning of 16 March and overwhelmed by a column of German tanks while it was in the act of moving forward to a position from which, in Captain Colley's opinion, it could attack with greater effect a column of Italian tanks which had previously been reported.

"In fact, the decision made by Captain Colley to take up this position, forward of the positions of the Free French column and closer to the enemy, gives ample proof of the point to which the offensive spirit was developed in this Battery. It can, I think, be stated quite definitely that if the Troop had had a few more minutes in which to get into position, it would have accomplished a remarkable job and would have caused serious losses to the enemy tank column.

"In spite of the fact that it was surprised, however, by an enemy who possessed a greater degree of manœuvrability and whose protection and armour were greatly superior, it continued to fire right up to the end. An inspection of the battlefield has shewn that some enemy tanks were forced to continue firing to within 100 yards of Captain Colley's guns. Five expended rounds of s.a.a. lying beside the body of one of the gunners of this Troop shewed that up to the last moment the gunners remained faithful to their duty as fighting troops.

"By acting in this way they could not hope to obtain results against tanks, but it is an act which proves to what degree your men maintained their sense of duty even in the face of death. There is, in this gesture, an element of pure heroism which deserves to be recorded."

These were the men who earned this tribute:

Killed: Lieut. J. W. Venning, Sergeant V. B. M. Banbury, Sergeant J. E. Steventon, Lance-Bombardier V. C. Buckland, Lance-Bombardier A. H. Russell, Gunners H. F. Brazington, H. L. V. House, T. Lloyd, L. Sheldon.

Prisoners of war, many of them wounded: Captain W. P. Colley, Sergeant Adamson, Sergeant Harper (who, with Gunner Smith, was repatriated, disabled, in 1943), Lance-Sergeant Peters, Lance-Sergeant Phillips, Bombardier P. Poynter, Lance-Bombardier Downey, Gunners Downs, Fry, Vizer, Snoddy, Godfrey, S. Smith, Spendlow, Reeves, Coleman and S. F. L. Ball, Driver-Mechanic Haigh, Driver Slim.

On the following day Lieut. Sewell and a French priest returned to the position. The dead were buried, the priest reading the funeral service. A day or so later three of the guns—their sights and breech mechanisms smashed—were salvaged.

The Regiment's fitters were able to rebuild one complete gun from the three, bearing still many battle scars. One could have wished that it might have been rescued, to adorn Armoury House, but it was not to be.

Nor, sadly, was another memento forthcoming which the Regiment would have dearly prized: for General Koenig had recommended the entire Troop, collectively, for the Croix de Guerre. His kindly gesture was frustrated, however, by G.H.Q. Middle East, who refused to recognise General Koenig as entitled to award honours in the name of France.

14. RECONSTRUCTION—II

March—May 1942

That month (March 1942) 11 Regiment, arduously preparing for their second essay in battle, suffered what every officer and man felt to be a personal loss. Lieut.-Colonel W. A. Ebbels, who had commanded the Regiment since September 1940, and shared to the full their trying baptism of fire, left to become C.R.A. 10 Armoured Division. His place was taken by Lieut.-Colonel G. B. Vaughan-Hughes, who had recently commanded an anti-tank regiment. A new Second-in-Command was posted at the same time, Major W. M. Leggatt, who had been on the staff of G.H.Q. Middle East. Major Benson, having been evacuated to a base hospital, was succeeded as B Battery commander by Major J. P. Sworder.

Leave started, and fortunate officers and other ranks were given spells of five days to spend among the heady delights of Cairo and Alexandria. Strictly speaking, the five days were supposed to include the return trip; but as the 500-mile journey to Cairo took from seven to 10 days, a certain amount of wangling was needed, and this was forthcoming.

Gradually the old 2 Armoured Brigade resumed shape. 9 Lancers once more linked with E Battery. Batteries served a spell with new Jock Columns, which here, with the limitless Desert to the south, had room for the fleeting adventures which were their proper function.

It was virtually their last appearance on the Libyan scene. The days of in-fighting were coming: and then the final pursuit when the whole Army would become a gigantic Jock Column, moving fast and free.

Their last few days produced certain hazards and excitements: with A Battery ranging No Man's Land in Barcol, commanded by Major A. H. Barclay of the Bays; B Battery with Welcol, under the Regiment's new Commanding Officer.

There was the moment when Major Mark Kerr,[1] commanding Barcol's infantry component of 1 Rifle Brigade, made his way alone across the Desert, four miles on foot, to reconnoitre an Italian leaguer—and was frustrated by a storm of barking from the leaguer's watch-dogs, which alarmed the Italians, and somewhat alarmed Kerr himself.

Good Friday, 3 April, was also a day of note. Seven enemy tanks, with a gun, overran Lieut. Mark Wathen's observation post at "The Dancing Man". He retired, leading them on towards the armoured squadron, but as soon as they saw the Bays' Honey tanks they quickly made off towards Mekili. In the long-range, high-speed skirmish that followed, Wathen's truck was thoroughly involved; and Lieut. Gerry de Boinville had the microphone shot out of his hand.

As the Jock Columns ended their adventurous career, so did their inventor, Major General Jock Campbell, V.C., killed in a motor accident in February, leaving a name for cheery valour as long as the fame of his 7 Armoured Division, the "Desert Rats", shall live.

Now again it was the Desert Rats' turn for the front line. 2 Armoured Brigade were sent back to thresh out anew the tactics of desert war, and to make the acquaintance of the new American tanks, the Grants; which were to prove, with the range and hitting power of their 75-mm. guns, a surprise to the enemy but, with the meagre 30-degree traverse which their lop-sided mounting permitted, something of a disappointment to those who handled them.

In an area designed by nature to be the eternal home of boredom; whose nearest landmark was an ancient, disused, sunken water cistern 20 miles away; whose topography was limited to numbered tar barrels set up to mark the route across featureless wastes, the Regiment had no time to be bored.

For the officers, there was the constant alternation of theory and practice in counter-attack, the role for which they were preparing. For fitters there was the derelict battlefield of Sidi Rezegh, strewn with vehicle casualties of the 1941 "Crusader" fight, which could be "cannibalised" to provide transport and spares. For the men, football, "physical jerks" and bathing trips to the beaches of Mersa Lucch filled in such gaps as training and maintenance left.

Not surprising, therefore, that when the Duke of Gloucester revisited the Regiment (he had seen them last in the far-away days of Chilton Foliat) he should pronounce them the fittest crowd he had seen in the Desert. Major General Lumsden, the Divisional Commander, was of course often in the lines, and among other visitors who came to see the reconstituted 2 Armoured Brigade shew their paces was the King of Greece.

Meanwhile events far and near were shaping the course of the desert war, both in the next few months and in the year of victory that lay ahead. The battle for Egypt had died down in Libya—but not ceased. It had shifted to Malta, menace, as long as it stood fast, to Rommel's supply line.

In two perilous months the Luftwaffe, from their airfields in Sicily and Crete, had driven our surface craft back into Levantine waters and so nearly neutralised Malta that Rommel was able to land, at Benghazi alone, 2000 tons of stores a day; while the much-needed 6-pounder high velocity anti-tank guns, to whose production Lord Beaverbrook was now turning his feverish energies, had three or four months' journey round the Cape to accomplish before they could be in our gunners' hands.

Remote, yet, in their effect on the desert war were other factors. German losses on the Eastern Front, in killed and wounded, had reached the million mark. Not yet, but in the months to come, reinforcements to the Panzer Armies of the Desert would dwindle. And Singapore had fallen—disaster that sent a shudder through the Empire; but it meant, for the desert armies, that divisions, who might have snatched victory in Libya, would no longer be diverted to withstand the Japanese onslaught.

Such considerations portended little, perhaps, to the gunner in the Desert, toiling to keep the working parts of his pieces free from sand. But they were ever present in the minds of the opposing commanders. For Rommel, would there ever be a better moment than this? His guns and tanks, still superior to most of the British armour, had by now reached almost parity in numbers. For General Auchinleck, was his 8 Army yet strong enough in men and armour to deal a decisive blow?

Rommel, well read in matters military, had perhaps come across the lines:

> Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just
> —And four times he who get his blow in fust.

On the night 26/27 May 1942 he struck.

NOTE TO CHAPTER FOURTEEN

[1] Afterwards killed in Italy.

15. KNIGHTSBRIDGE—I

May—June 1942

The Battle of Gazala, or Knightsbridge, or the Cauldron—units who took part remember it by all these names—was fought over a rough rectangle 2000 square miles in area. From Ain el Gazala at the north-west corner—a coastal hamlet noteworthy only for its fresh-water springs—a strong British minefield stretched south; bulging, in the north, towards the enemy, then inclining south-east to end at Bir Zeidan, where it overlapped another minefield stretching northwards from the isolated strong point of Bir Hacheim, at the bottom (south-west) corner of the rectangle.

Along the northern edge of the battle area, Mussolini's coastal tarmac road, the Via Balbia, joined Gazala to the port of Tobruk and continued eastwards.

Across the middle of the battlefield stretched a long and more or less continuous ridge, about 160 feet high, bearing a variety of names which all serve as landmarks in the battle: from west to east, Rigel, Raml, Sidi Rezegh.

South-west of this two smaller ridges, Hagiag es Sidrah and Dahar el Aslag, enclosed, with the two overlapping arms of the minefield, the area of intense fighting which was to be known as the Cauldron.

From north to south the British forces (with their Commonwealth and Fighting French allies) were arrayed thus:

On the coast, their right flank resting on the sea at Gazala, 1 South African Division (Major-General Pienaar). Next 50 Division (Major-General Ramsden), with their three Brigades (151, 69 and 150) in the line, stretched downwards facing due west. A gap of 10 miles separated them from the Fighting French Brigade (General Koenig) holding Bir Hacheim.

OPPOSITE

UPPER: *Lt.-Col. Richard Goodbody with Driver Taylor.*

LOWER: *The Ruweisat Party: Lieut. B. H. S. Laskey, Lieut. J. P. Thomson-Glover, Capt. R. L. Trapnell, Major G. R. Armstrong, Capt. G. N. P. C. de Boinville, Lieut. J. A. F. Sewell, Capt. K. E. Bolton, Capt. John Martin. Also of the Ruweisat Party, but not in the picture: Robin Smith, John McAllum.* (*See page 96.*)

Twelve miles in rear of the centre of the minefield, 201 Guards Brigade held a strong box—the old British square adapted to armour—at Knightsbridge. This spot, destined to become famous in military history, was, before the battle, just a barrel in which a banner was stuck, marking where Trigh Capuzzo—an east-west track, a mere series of ruts worn in the sand, its route indicated by barrel beacons—crossed the north-south Trigh Bir Hacheim, linking that post with the outskirts of Tobruk.

The port of Tobruk itself, on which the British supply line largely depended, was garrisoned by 2 South African Division (Major-General Klopper) with 9 Indian Brigade.

Six miles east of Knightsbridge, the smaller box of El Adem covered the headquarters of XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Gott) commanding the northward part of the British line.

Rearward of the Guards box, 1 Armoured Division (Major-General Lumsden) held 2 Armoured Brigade (Brigadier Briggs) —including 11 Regiment and their three linked Armoured Regiments—and 22 Armoured Brigade, poised for counter-attack should the line be pierced or outflanked.

The wide open spaces to south and east of the battlefield were covered by 7 Armoured Division (Major-General Messervy) with 4 Armoured Brigade. Thirty miles to the south, 3 Indian Motor Brigade and 29 Indian Brigade watched the open flank of XXX Corps (Lieut.-General Norrie) who had 1 and 7 Armoured Divisions and these flank Brigades under him. General Ritchie at 8 Army Headquarters commanded the whole array.

The battle opened on the night 26/27 May 1942 and closed on 30 June. It divides into seven phases: (1) the German breakthrough, ending on 30 May; (2) the battle of the Cauldron proper, ending on 6 June; (3) the British attack from Gazala, ending on 10 June; (4) the fall of Bir Hacheim on the night 10/11 June; (5) the reverse to British armour on 12 June; (6) the capture of Tobruk on 20 June; and (7) the final phase, the fighting withdrawal through Mersa Matruh to Alamein.

It began in the triumphant expectation of victory—missed, in the outcome, by a hair's breadth. It continued in confusion. It culminated in disaster.

OPPOSITE

UPPER: *Priests in action.*

LOWER: *"Selling a dummy." Telegraph pole on Bofors chassis, rigged up by the Germans to imitate an 88-mm. gun. It held up 2 Armoured Brigade for a whole day.*

Not irretrievable disaster, however. The units who fought their way out had lost many of their numbers, most of their armour and equipment; but they had not lost their cheerful, indomitable courage. 8 Army had not lost their identity, nor General Auchinleck his composure. Nevertheless, the Army had suffered a major defeat.

The reasons, obscured then in the fog of war, are, in the light of history, plain.

The battle was fought, on the British side, by a committee. The chairman, himself a tactician of outstanding discernment, enjoying the steadfast confidence of his troops, was imbued—obsessed is almost the word—with the principle of letting the man on the spot do the job. He himself was 500 miles away. Only partial information of what was going on reached him, even when he flew up to the battle zone—as thrice he did—for the cogent reason that his committee seldom knew themselves.

As is the way of committees in time of crisis, they were at variance among themselves, uncertain in planning, hesitant in execution. Those among them who appreciated the need of the moment, which was for a blow of maximum speed and concentrated strength, were overborne and saw the moment pass, the strength frittered away in piecemeal struggles, and the utmost gallantry balked of its reward.

This—not the deadly 88-mm. gun and the skill with which the enemy handled it (though these, too, played their part)—was the secret of the British reverse.

By contrast, the enemy commander, for every day of the 35 days, was in the thick of the fight, exposing himself at times to unwise and unnecessary hazards, but seeing at first hand how the battle fared.

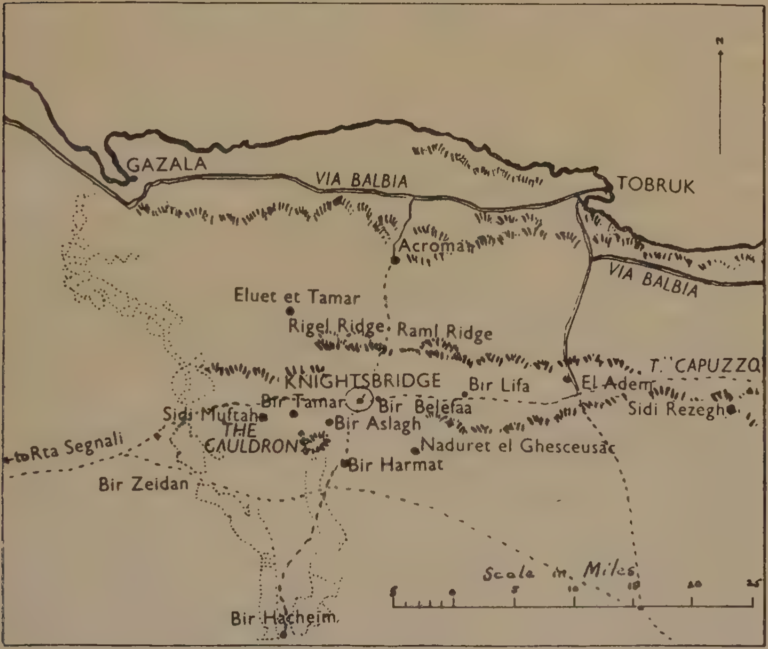
He, too, had moments when his orders were questioned or disregarded; but he was there in person to enforce them when they were right or change them when (as more than once occurred) they were wrong. Not only was he able, in the vulgar phrase, to tell his generals where they got off. More to the point, he was able to tell them where they should get on.

How near the battle's first phase came to a British victory is illustrated by a passage in Brigadier Desmond Young's "Rommel". By 30 May the German commander had swung round the south of the British line—and encountered two surprises: 150 Brigade in their box barred his way; and 1 Armoured Division with their

Grant tanks, whose hitting power he had not sampled, pinned him with his back to the minefield. Just behind him, X Italian Corps had made a gap, but it was under hot fire from both flanks.

"We were in a really desperate position", wrote General Bayerlein, Rommel's Chief of Staff. "No food, no water, no petrol, very little ammunition . . . In another 24 hours we should have had to surrender."

KNIGHTSBRIDGE


N
GAZALA
VIA BALBIA
TOBRUK
Acroma
VIA BALBIA
Eluet et Tamar
Rigel Ridge
Raml Ridge
KNIGHTSBRIDGE
Bir Lifa
T. CAPUZZO
El Adem
Bir Tamar
Bir Belefaa
Sidi Rezegh
Sidi Muftah
THE CAULDRON
Bir Aslagh
Naduret el Ghesceuasc
to Rta Segnali
Bir Harmat
Bir Zeidan
Scale in Miles
5
0
5
10
15
20
25
Bir Hacheim

Rommel himself had passed through the gap, and was at his headquarters on the British side of the minefield when Major Bobby Archer-Shee, 10 Hussars, who had just been made prisoner, demanded to see him, to protest against the plight of the Indian prisoners, taken when 3 Indian Motor Brigade were overrun by Rommel's right hook.

They were fighting for water. Archer-Shee spoke up boldly on their behalf. If Rommel could not give them food and water, he should send them back to the British lines.

Rommel was reasonable and even sympathetic. "You are getting exactly the same ration of water as the Afrika Korps and myself," he said; "half a cup. But I quite agree that we cannot go on like this. If we don't get a convoy through to-night I shall have to ask General Ritchie for terms. You can take a letter to him from me . . ."

But the *coup de grâce* did not come. Rommel's supplies did come through; and the promise of victory vanished.

Not for the only time, the British commander foresaw Rommel's plans, but not his speed. By dawn on 27 May 1942 he had overrun the two outlying Motor Brigades and surprised H.Q. 7 Armoured Division almost in that state of deshabille for which the soldiery have a forcible but unseemly expression. Then, splitting his forces, he wheeled 15 and 21 Panzer Divisions to catch the British defenders in the rear, while 90 Light Division—their vehicles fitted with airscrews so that the dust clouds they raised should suggest tanks—pierced northwards.

So rapidly did the Light Division move that Lieut. W. N. Pratt, the newly-appointed H.A.C. Quartermaster, and 2/Lieut. A. W. McMath, bowling along towards Capuzzo on their way to a course, suddenly found themselves in enemy hands; while in the overrunning of a NAAFI depot the British forces lost their entire supply of whisky.

Knightsbridge was the object of the Panzers' attack; and 2 Armoured Brigade were sent down early on 27 May, from their last night's resting-place on the Bir Belefaa hills above the Box, to meet it.

They moved into action with the confident precision of battle drill, 10 Hussars—using their Grant tanks for the first time—leading, with B Battery in support. They had hardly gone two miles when Captain R. N. Smith, up with the tanks as the Battery's right O.P., was fired on—though the Germans had been reported 15 miles away. Regiment and Battery dropped into action facing south-west and in a sharp engagement knocked out four anti-tank guns, then, as ever, in the van of the enemy attack.

They were about to drive their blow home when orders came at noon for the entire Brigade to swing right towards Bir Harmat, where the Bays were engaging a strong column with 40 tanks.

Twelve enemy anti-tank guns were silenced before the cruisers overran their position. The gunners shammed dead as our tanks charged, and had sprung up and reversed their guns to rake the tanks' rear when a second cruiser wave took them by surprise.

Two hundred and fifty Germans, running through the Battery positions with their hands up, were gathered in by the Rifle Brigade carriers. With them came Indian troops whom they had captured earlier in the day. "2 Battalion 115 Lorried Infantry", said the German report, "were wiped out."

This brisk and successful action, broken off at nightfall, was resumed with gusto at dawn, when an enemy column of soft vehicles, hedged around with 88-mm. guns, was seen moving north. 10 Hussars put in an attack with B and E Batteries in support, using a smoke screen to cover their Crusaders. The guns were overrun. Seven were destroyed and 35 prisoners taken.

Here Captain Robin Smith, O.P. to B Battery, won the Military Cross. Moving forward on the flank of the leading squadron, he was fired on by a 50-mm. anti-tank gun. He attacked it on his own, destroying both gun and tractor and capturing two surviving members of the detachment—11 Regiment's first captives on their own account.

Now General Lumsden called the 10 Hussars and 9 Lancers groups to a new task—to swing westwards towards Bir Aslagh, where two Panzer columns were thrusting north; the Bays to remain, watching southwards.

Sweeping up a shallow depression, the two armoured Regiments drove back the enemy in one of the greatest tank-to-tank battles of the entire war: B Battery pouring down shell fire from the ridge above them, E Battery accounting for five anti-tank guns. Towards evening both Regiments reported that their Grants had almost run out of ammunition and the Bays were ordered to come in on their right. The attack was renewed with great success, save that one squadron of 10 Hussars, going wide to the left, came under heavy fire from enemy 88-mm. and 105-mm. guns and were virtually wiped out.

As the Brigade withdrew to leaguer for the night just east of the battlefield they saw their Royal Engineer Field Troop destroying the day's bag; and it was a handsome one—four 105-mm. guns, five 88-mm., six 50-mm., four Mark IV tanks and one Mark III.

There followed two days of violent fighting, when Rommel's fate hung in the balance. Baffled in their attack deep into the British rear, 90 Light Division had recoiled west and were striving to link with the Panzer Divisions now hemmed against the Gazala minefield—first with a view to thrusting north together towards Tobruk; then, when they found what fierce resistance they were up against, to interpose a strong rearguard while the bulk of the German troops pulled back through the gap in the minefield which the Italians had prepared. It was not going to be easy, for the gap was under heavy shell fire from both flanks.

Scarcely had 2 Armoured Brigade broken leaguer at break of day when they met the onrush of the two enemy columns—50 tanks from the north-west, 60 from the south-west, converging on them.

It was a thrilling sight as the Brigade moved towards the enemy in box formation—the Grants grim and powerful, the Crusaders sleek and low, gliding forward over the rough sand and stone with a curious rocking motion. The Bays, in the centre of the line, were first to come into action. As they swept up the slope where the enemy lay, Colonel Draffen, their commanding officer, ordered A Battery to continue firing until his leading squadrons reached the crest. The guns paused; the Crusaders poured over the top and, fighting magnificently, finished off the enemy. Thirty-five prisoners were taken; the rest lay dead around their eight battered guns.

The Brigade took their stand facing west, in an arc around Bir Aslagh. Soon 10 Hussars and B Battery were hard pressed as about 100 tanks bore down on them from the west and north. Orders were to hold them off until dark. Major Sworder stuck to his gun position despite tank attacks, artillery and machine-gun fire. Severely wounded, he refused to leave until he had been relieved. He was evacuated to the Delta, then to England, where he learned that he had been awarded the Military Cross.

Lieuts. S. A. G. Watt and J. D. Henderson were wounded by the same shell as Major Sworder. Lieut. J. F. Turral was also hit, and the Battery had five good men killed—Lance-Sergeant D. Maddox, Lance-Bombardier R. Best and Gunners G. L. O'Neill, D. W. Griffiths and G. J. Dodd. 2/Lieut. F. C. Haldin of 239 Anti-Tank Battery (officered by the H.A.C.) was killed.

Bombardier H. R. Parry, No. 1 of a B Battery gun, seeing his trailer burst into flames as a shell hit it, and one of his detachment killed, ordered them to their slit trenches while he walked calmly to the trailer, dragged out the remaining trays and sprayed them with a fire extinguisher. For this he received the Military Medal.

Now A Battery, coming to the aid of B and 10 Hussars, switched right. The movement left the Regiment's Anti-Tank Battery (239), under Major J. R. O. Charlton, badly exposed. C Troop, too, while in view of the enemy and raked by their heavy machine-guns, were too far away to engage over open sights. Realising that this new thrust would endanger the guns, Captain Armstrong, in charge of the Battery gun position, asked permission from Major McDermid to move them back 600 yards, where they could fight from behind the lip of the same saucer that sheltered D Troop.

Under heavy fire, Armstrong led them to their new position, then went back to where the two Anti-Tank troops were fighting desperately. One troop had fired four rounds, one per gun, and smashed three German tanks, before their own four guns were knocked out.

Collecting their wounded, and towing out three of their four disabled guns, Armstrong brought the remnants of the troop back, and again turned into the enemy fire to succour the other troop.

By the time he reached them their splendid fight was over. All four guns were scrap metal—wheels buckled, trails smashed, even barrels twisted. All around lay dead and wounded. Major Charlton, the Battery Commander, was dead in a layer's seat. Lieut. K. C. E. Fishburn was hit.

Armstrong collected all who were still alive and brought them back, winning the Military Cross. "That was more or less *the* occasion for which he was given the M.C.", wrote Major McDermid in a letter home, "but I could give you several others equally good."

Captain Howard Bourne of B Battery was promoted to command the decimated 239 Anti-Tank Battery.

Towards evening a sandstorm brought the day's fighting to an end. It had cost our armour dear. 10 Hussars, with only three tanks left, had to be withdrawn to refit. The other groups leaguered roughly where they had fought.

During the night a fine piece of work was done by Gunner Dedman, E Troop signaller. His truck, lent to the Rifle Brigade for a patrol, suddenly came upon an enemy anti-tank gun and received a direct hit at 80 yards range. 2/Lieut. Tony Dewing, the R.B. patrol officer, was killed and the driver, Gunner Gage, badly wounded. Dedman, himself unhurt, brought back the truck under heavy small arms fire.

By dawn on 30 May there was no doubt—the enemy was retiring. British prisoners, sent back because the Germans had no food or water for them, told of tanks at a standstill for lack of petrol, and the havoc caused by the British fire. From Bir

Aslagh southwards Rommel had sited a line of 30 tanks, with a strong screen of anti-tank guns.

This was his rearguard, awaiting the moment when a fresh British formation would be sent in to crush his retreating forces against the box which (as he had found to his surprise and perturbation) 150 Brigade of 50 Division had established near Sidi Muftah just inside the British minefield, commanding the enemy's line of retreat.

But that moment did not come.

Neither 2 Armoured Brigade, nor 22 Armoured Brigade on their left, had the hitting power, for each was by now reduced to the strength of a regiment. Twice 9 Lancers were put in. Twice, supported by the Regiment's fire, they charged across a mile and a half of open Desert against a hull-down enemy. Twice they were driven back.

Two remarkable bits of salvage stand out among the events of the day.

Two direct hits on Major Croxton's armoured car wrecked a rear wheel and put paid to the steering, leaving the Battery Commander stranded, under heavy fire, between the opposing lines of tanks. To the rescue came Captain T. F. Butler-Stoney in his Honey, towing the armoured car back half a mile, whence it was by and by recovered.

This was one of the items which earned Butler-Stoney the Military Cross. Throughout the battle, however, he had been conspicuous for his coolness as forward observing officer, directing the fire of his troop and passing back information regardless of danger. He was wounded in the leg later in the battle but refused to be sent back before the Regiment withdrew.

The second salvage feat had mingled with its fortitude a slightly comic element. A 3-tonner, bringing up ammunition, lost its way and drove through the O.P. line and into range of the enemy anti-tank guns. In a moment the cab was riddled, but to his astonishment the driver found that neither he nor his engine had been hit.

He lay doggo till a sandstorm gave him an opportunity—then backed gingerly, a few yards at a time, till he saw he was near our forward troops, whereupon he dashed for safety and arrived at the guns with his load intact.

That night the Brigade leaguered where they stood. Just before dusk Major Croxton and Captain Butler-Stoney spied an irresistible target for E Battery—a group of German lorries refuelling tanks (ominous sign that the German commander was no longer cut off from his supplies). As the Battery engaged, Stukas came over.

The result was prompt reprisal. The Batteries' wagon lines were duly bombed and at the same time heavily shelled. Several casualties resulted, and a number of vehicles were wrecked, including a quad whose load of ammunition was removed from the blazing vehicle with the utmost coolness by Major McDermid, Fitter-Sergeant Lucas, Gunner "Banger" Stephenson and Gunner Chouffot.

The swift onset of darkness gave the batteries their first taste of night firing. They noted with some astonishment how darkness seemed to magnify the noise of the guns.

Away on their right at midnight they heard sounds of battle. Knightsbridge box had sent out I Battery R.H.A., a company of Scots Guards and two anti-tank troops to shell the gap through which, despite 150 Brigade's opposition, Rommel was beginning to get his supplies. Eight miles out, the column ran into a German rearguard in the dark. Five 25-pounders, seven 6-pounders and 157 men were lost. It was just another little attack.

But the concerted onslaught, the prospect of which had reduced Rommel almost to despair—the combined attack by every uncommitted unit at 8 Army's command—did not take place.

Indeed, but for a slight exchange of gunfire in the morning, and an unpleasant air attack on the wagon lines which caused a few casualties, 31 May might almost have been a day at a practice camp until noon, when the Desert took on its most uncanny mood.

Both sides ceased to fire as, for two hours, the mirage made observation hopeless. Men appeared the size of trees; small trucks as big as London buses, rising in fantastic ripples, floating on silvery shimmering lakes. When the mirage had dissolved each O.P. on the front was given three Italian M13 tanks to knock out. Orders were to expend up to 100 rounds on each tank. A few hits were scored. "The enemy are surprisingly quiet", recorded A Battery's war diary. "It seems uncanny."

The Brigade leaguered that night just east of the churned-up, debris-strewn arena—a battlefield within a battlefield—which will ever be remembered in military annals as the Cauldron.

16. KNIGHTSBRIDGE — II

June 1942

By 1 June Rommel's doubts and difficulties were over. The box behind the minefield, whose existence had so surprised him, was overwhelmed despite the characteristic dogged tenacity of the men from Tyne and Tees. His supply line through the minefield was now clear of threats.

The setback he had inflicted on the two armoured brigades, even if only temporary, had given him a precious opportunity of pulling in every disabled tank that could possibly be got running again, and his repair shops were working hammer and tongs. He had sent 90 Light Division and the Italian Ariete Division to draw a cordon round the French post at Bir Hacheim, against the time when he would be ready to mount a formal attack. All he needed now was time. 8 Army gave him five days.

Whatever Higher Command may have made of his intentions, to the exultant gunners of 11 Regiment, who had so far got good value for their salvos, it seemed that Rommel was retiring. As he pulled back his guns and armour towards the western edge of the Cauldron, B Battery planned to help him on his way.

Before dawn on 1 June Captain Kenneth Bolton and Captain Robin Smith crept forward with signal gear and a Rifle Brigade escort, to establish Bolton "on his tummy" on the Aslagh ridge—and as day broke he caught an enemy leaguer with a nice burst of fire before they had time to disperse. E Battery's position was harried in the afternoon by long-range fire, and a 150-mm. shell wounded Major Croxton in the shoulder, costing him the use of his arm. Major F. B. S. Maclaren took over command of the Battery.

Everywhere there was an air of expectancy. Four 25-pounder regiments arrived in the Aslagh area. There was talk of a night attack, the counterstroke which would pin Rommel against the minefield and the 150 Brigade box (news of its fall had not yet reached the troops). But when it would begin or what the plan would be, nobody knew. All they did know was that the night attack was postponed.

On 2 June, seizing the initiative which 8 Army had forfeited, Rommel struck, using as a smoke screen a sandstorm of almost record duration and intensity. When it abated, he was found to have two Panzer columns pressing north.

One had struck towards the rising ground of Eluet et Tamar and had already driven a small South African force back in disorder to Acroma. 4 Armoured Brigade, intervening from the high ground, attacked in loose formation and one regiment got badly mauled. The Bays group—consisting now of the one remaining cavalry Regiment, with 11 Regiment and 1 Rifle Brigade—were switched north to help meet this threat.

By the time they arrived, 4 Armoured Brigade's attack had been thrown back. The Regiment leaguered on the Maabus el Rigel, not having encountered the enemy, though flares in every direction shewed there were Germans all round them. On 3 June they put in some steady long-range shooting against an enemy column away to the west. War diaries are unanimous about 4 June—"a very quiet day . . . no bombing, no shelling".

The British counter-attack came—too late for victory—on the night 4/5 June. At 0300 hours the Cauldron rocked as 10,000 rounds of 25-pounder were fired in 35 minutes. But Rommel's main forces, on the far side, were further back than Higher Command had imagined, and the torrent of shells fell short.

Beneath the barrage 5 Indian Division poured into the Cauldron. Advancing in the dark, over ground they had no opportunity of reconnoitring, their only landmarks and objectives a series of numbered barrels, to join up with units they had never seen before, with little information about the enemy and that mostly incorrect, they nevertheless reached their first objectives with success; their gunners with them, frantically and unsuccessfully trying to dig in on ground which proved to be paved with great slabs of stone. By dawn the Division had run into the full strength of Rommel's artillery.

A new menace now appeared—the Mark IV Panzer with its long medium-velocity 75-mm. gun, hard-hitting at 2000 yards.[1] Pinned down by shell and mortar fire, the infantry were cut to pieces. By afternoon 15 and 21 Panzer Divisions had enveloped them in an encircling attack.

Throughout the night, throughout the following day, the guns, facing in all directions, fought with a spirit never exceeded in the annals of the Royal Regiment: wounded men crawling from gun to gun as the detachments died; commanding officers killed in the layers' seats; till 96 guns had been overwhelmed.

Meanwhile for 48 hours 2 Armoured Brigade were hurried hither and thither under the series of chaotic orders which, from now on, confused rather than swayed the ill-fated battle.

It had been intended that E Battery should move south at first light to aid the French at Bir Hacheim. In the event, the entire Bays group were swept down towards Naduret el Ghesceusac. There at 1500 hours they were turned north-west again to aid the Indian Division, and particularly to meet the encircling thrust of 15 Panzer Division from the south.

Going into action at 1930 hours the Regiment had a successful shoot against German batteries and lorried infantry, but at 2030 hours they were ordered north-east, with 2 and 22 Armoured Brigades, to relieve the pressure on the Knightsbridge box which the right fork of Rommel's thrust was threatening. Under heavy shell fire they formed up and moved off for a nightmare march, in pitch darkness, between the western edge of the Knightsbridge minefield and the enemy. The day did not pass without casualties. Lieut. Q. A. Thomas of 239 A/T Battery was among the wounded.

The task of keeping the guns supplied with ammunition, as they moved from one position to another across an area seething with battle, was one calling for determination and a clear head. No one shewed these qualities more than Bombardier W. J. R. Boardman, N.C.O. in charge of A Battery's replenishment. From wagon lines which were constantly under shell fire and dive-bomb attack, to gun positions often swept by armour-piercing shot and machine-gun bullets, he brought his tractors again and again, and thus won the Military Medal.

By dawn of 6 June the Regiment were pressing eastwards to face the new thrust. As they approached the little hills north of the Trigh Capuzzo they ran into trouble. A German column had circled the British flank in the dark and lay on the crest of a ridge 1600 yards to the east, with four 88-mm. guns.

The Batteries stopped in their tracks and went into action, an action fought with true Horse Artillery verve and precision: O.P. officers keeping their Honeys moving; detachments firing now over open sights with gun control, now as troops. Sergeant Swingler, a No. 1 of E Battery, and Gunner Wakelin were killed by a direct hit on their gun. Lieut. Boys, G.P.O. of G Troop, was laying his gun when a shell burst alongside, badly wounding him. (He died on the hospital ship.)

Bombardier Kirk, Acting No. 1, carried on till his ammunition ran out; then, disregarding the enemy's fire, reported the situation on the wireless and set about tending the wounded. His fine leadership earned him the Military Medal.

While the fight was at its height, a fresh column of enemy guns appeared clearly outlined against the rising sun, and opened up on E Battery by direct fire. No. 2 gun was knocked out at once. Lance-Sergeant C. B. Dornton-Duff engaged the enemy over open sights till the column was driven off, minus three 88-mm. guns. For his good work here Dornton-Duff, too, received the Military Medal.

With admirable enterprise and disregard of danger, Major Victor Turner[2] (whose company of 1 Rifle Brigade supported E Battery) and Lieutenant McAllum brought up ammunition under intense fire. But the Batteries' positions, taken up on the spur of the moment, were too exposed. They were withdrawn westwards where there was better cover. There they awaited a renewed attack, but it did not come.

Next morning brought fresh plans and a change of command. Passing from 7 Armoured Division, under whom they had fought for the past two days, 2 Armoured Brigade came again under 1 Armoured Division, with orders to move north-west. They had not gone far before they were turned about to aid the Knightsbridge box, threatened by a new onslaught of some 50 tanks.

To regain their old position, as they were ordered to do, was impossible, for the enemy now held it in force; but from where they were they brought down such fire that the attack was beaten off with heavy losses. The Regiment's casualties from shell fire were light, but 2/Lieut. Colin Leechman, struggling to extract a truck from among our own mines, was mortally wounded.

Throughout 8 June the Regiment stayed where they were, without orders, without information, though there were rumours galore of activities to the north and south.

The committee in charge of the destinies of the British forces was now in full swing. A proposed full-scale thrust along the coast, by 1 South African Division, had, after debate, resolved itself into nine separate but simultaneous attacks, each a company strong, carried out with dash, repulsed with fairly heavy losses.

Through lanes in the minefields South African armoured cars roved on pirate raids, upsetting German supply columns. Round the south of the minefield, 7 Motor Brigade and Lord Garmoyle's column of 2 Rifle Brigade raised havoc in the enemy's rear. (What might an armoured brigade have done? their historian enquires.) There was some suggestion of a determined and powerful left hook, but it did not get very far on the committee's agenda.

Meanwhile, 2 Armoured Brigade were left more or less to their own devices. They employed their time not unprofitably—as when that afternoon, seeing a large enemy column forming up to attack the Knightsbridge box, they seized their first chance to fire a regimental target. After a model concentration the smoke dispersed to shew the column virtually wiped out.

They had their venturesome moments, as when Major Hopkins sent Captain Robin Smith forward with a "winkle" gun to snipe a few scattered enemy tanks. Just in time, Captain Bolton, from his O.P. on Rigel, spotted some German Mark IIIs which were stalking the stalkers, and the "winkle" gun was hastily recalled. "Odd shots at odd trucks" was all one battery's war diary could record for 9 June.

So quiet was the following day that, on arrival of a laden canteen lorry from Tobruk, there was a pay parade followed by a sell-out of luxuries. That day Lieut.-Colonel Vaughan-Hughes departed to become CRA 7 Armoured Division, handing over to Major Leggatt, the Second-in-Command.

E Battery, reduced to four guns (one had been lent to the Guards in Knightsbridge, two to B Battery; one, showing signs of wear, was in workshops), were linked with Major W. D. (Bill) Blacker's Battery from 2 R.H.A. (also down to four guns) under his command, supporting 4 County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters).

All was not so quiet in the south. Their ammunition, food and water reduced to zero but their courage undiminished, the French, during the night 10/11 June, made a pugnacious withdrawal from the Bir Hacheim box, which had so long been a barrier to the German advance.[3]

The enemy were not slow to react, pushing a strong armoured drive to cut into the British rear at El Adem.[4] As they lunged north-east on 12 June the British armour was strung out across their path: the Bays Group on the left, then 4 Armoured Brigade, the Sharpshooters linking them with the Knightsbridge box.

By 0945 hours the Bays were heavily engaged against motorised infantry and 100 tanks, seeking to turn their flank; A and E Batteries firing hard in their support from their position north of Bir Belefaa. At noon B Battery, who, with the Sharpshooters, had been opposing a thrust nearer Knightsbridge, moved east to lend their fire in support of the Bays.

As they passed through A Echelon a large formation of dive bombers caught them in a devastating attack. There were 40 or 50 casualties. Battery Sergeant Major J. H. Thorns, Staff-Sergeant A. Goodman and Bombardier H. R. Parry—three stalwarts hard to replace—were killed, together with Bombardiers N. S. Donaldson, G. H. Clark and A. C. Smith and Gunners F. Knight, J. C. Smith and F. J. Mann. Captain J. S. Martin, the Regimental Medical Officer, was (as usual) on the spot and did splendid work on several bad cases.

Contesting every yard the armour fell back, pivoting on Knightsbridge. At one time the Bays, now reduced to six Grants and as many Crusaders, were only 200 yards in front of the guns which A and E Batteries were serving under a hail of fire, while Major Hopkins reorganised his stricken B Battery. This he did so quickly that before 48 hours had elapsed they were back in the battle again, to the surprise of the Divisional Commander and staff.

Despite dust and smoke and fading light, Captain Butler-Stoney and Major Brian Maclaren kept their guns supplied with targets. Not content with that, Maclaren in his Honey had a tank-to-tank battle on his own, helping with his 37-mm. gun to destroy an enemy Mark III.

Captain Bolton of B, Lieut. Drage of A and Lieut. K. F. Stott of 239 A/T Battery were among the day's wounded.

As the day drew to a close, the detachments now found themselves showered with machine-gun tracer from behind, where German lorried infantry had swept round their flank: but the Bays, turning on them with their Besas, drove them off.

It was an anxious night as the Batteries leaguered where they had fought. Major Bill Blacker's "famous last words" when things looked their grimmest—words reflecting annoyance rather than dejection—were long remembered in E Battery: "D—— it! Dead or in the bag to-morrow, d—— it." (Fortunately neither prognostication proved true.)[5]

For the Germans it had been a costly two days. It was with increasing caution that their tanks now advanced into the British fire—but they were in possession of the battlefield; tanks and guns, though knocked out, might still be salvaged.

For 8 Army they had been two days of disaster, days of unco-ordinated orders, of headquarters out of touch with their troops, of changing command and faulty information. The artillery regiments which had been lost, complete, in the Cauldron were bitterly missed now, for only 25-pounders could cope with the fence of 88-mm. guns behind which the German tanks advanced; and there were not enough 25-pounder batteries to go round.

Nor, in tank-to-tank battle, could the Crusaders, still the bulk of our tank force, stand up with their 2-pounder guns against the German tanks, with heavier guns and longer range, on anything like equal terms. On 12 June alone 120 cruisers and some 30 infantry tanks had been lost. The Desert was strewn with the wrecks of Grants, Crusaders and Stuarts, beyond all recovery now that the British forces had retired.

Still pivoting on Knightsbridge, the British line fell back doggedly on 13 June, in a slow anti-clockwise movement, attacked from east and south by columns which, by now, had all the high ground from El Adem to Knightsbridge in their hands.

Setting out eastwards in the dawn sunshine, led by their Battery Captain sitting on top of his truck smoking his morning pipe, A Battery ran full tilt into them. A wave of the hand—still holding the pipe—signalled "Right about wheel", and the Battery came into action in the first covered position they could find, a hundred yards back, near a small square Italian fort known as the Blockhouse. Up came General Lumsden.

"Are you aware there are 40 German tanks coming toward us, Armstrong?" the General asked. "What have you done about it, Gunner?"

Armstrong replied "We are doing what we can". He had in fact signalled Major McDermid, who was already getting busy. There followed an hour or two of unabated fury. The Bays, whose left flank this new thrust threatened, came through.

Then, to clinch the matter, General Lumsden ordered up Lieut.-Colonel "Fairy" Foote with his 7 Royal Tank Regiment, charging through to hold the position till dusk, and winning the Commander a well-deserved V.C.

Meanwhile more tanks appeared from the south-west. Shells were bouncing round the Battery position, attacked from two sides at once. Frantically the detachments dug themselves in till, on each order to fire, a hand would come up to lay the dial sight, No. 2 would set range and pull the firing lever, and all would drop to ground again.

At the gun position stood George Buchanan, his tin hat full of holes, several shell-splinters in him, pouring with blood and dizzy. "I'm all right", he said, but Armstrong pushed him into a truck bound for the Regimental Aid Post, and next saw him in Colonel Ogier Ward's hospital in Cairo.

Lance-Bombardier R. S. Williams, his wireless assistant, had no time to dig in his wireless truck—perched, anyway, on a stony patch. He was too busy with signals. His truck was holed in 30 places. For two days he had carried on imperturbably and his conduct earned him the Military Medal.

By now, all three Batteries had joined in the fight, harrying the on-coming enemy for two hours and themselves suffering 20 casualties. Three men were killed, and Lieut. Gordon Reed was among the wounded.

A fine example was set by Gunner D. B. Simpson of A Battery. This gun-layer was wounded early in the day. He would not leave his post while the fight was on. Having received first aid during a lull, he returned to his gun during the hottest bombardment, when all the other numbers had become casualties. With another wounded man and two borrowed ammunition numbers he got the gun into action and served it until the Troop withdrew.

Four times in one day his Troop took up a new position to face a fresh attack. Though during the next move he was sent to the Regimental Aid Post, he refused to be evacuated, and returned to the layer's seat for the rest of the day. His devotion to duty earned him the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

By afternoon a new attack fell on them from the west. Twenty-nine tanks of 21 Panzer Division, advancing along Rigel Ridge, overran a Scots Guards box which had been established there and —in breach of the canons of desert war—forced the Guardsmen to walk before them as they advanced on the Regiment's guns.

The ruse failed. By a pre-arranged signal the men raced away to either flank, nearly all of them escaping. Still the tanks came on, overrunning one troop of 239 Anti-Tank Battery and taking Lieut. J. D. McLennan and all the detachments prisoners. But they could not face the massed guns of the Regiment 1000 yards away, and reined back.

It was no longer a matter of holding the Gazala line: still less, as had been optimistically envisaged, of breaking through to the south and turning the enemy flank. It was a matter, now, of holding, ridge by ridge, a coastal strip through which the Gazala line's defenders, 1 South African Division and part of 50 Division, could be withdrawn to fight another day. (The other part of 50 Division, by a bold stroke, broke through the enemy line opposite them and, wheeling south, fought their way round to the open Desert, across the rear of the Panzer forces, to rejoin their Division in due time.)

That night the great box of Knightsbridge was evacuated by a manœuvre as remarkable for its dexterity as the 18 days' siege had been for its tenacity. Covered by 4 County of London Yeomanry and E Battery, the Guards and 2 Regiment R.H.A. withdrew, unmolested, towards Acroma.

Dawn on 14 June found the remnants of the British armour strung in an arc barring the way to Acroma. What was left of 2 Armoured Brigade—the Bays, with their 11 surviving tanks, A and B Batteries and 1 Rifle Brigade—faced south at Eluet et Tamar. Their left rested on a box improvised—with "token" and dummy mines—by the Worcesters, on the far side of which 22 Armoured Brigade (4 County of London Yeomanry and E Battery) prolonged the line across the Bir Hacheim track to link with 4 Armoured Brigade.

Throughout the day Panzer forces probed this line. Forty-six tanks at 0800 hours threatened 22 Armoured Brigade. The Bays, sent to help, were by mid-afternoon "fighting like tigers" while the Batteries "fought like mad—five O.P.s—all the Afrika Korps to shoot at".

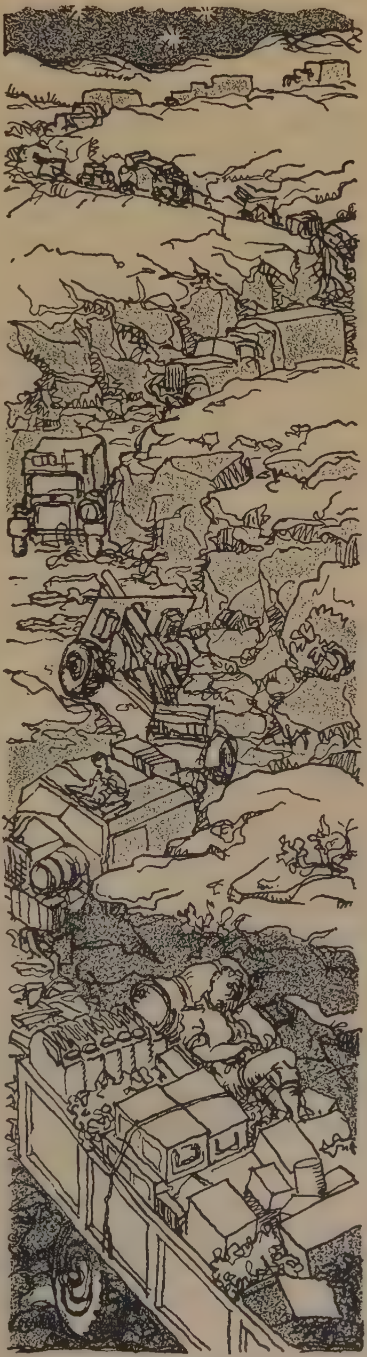
One by one the improvised fortresses fell. Under cover of a sandstorm the Worcesters' box was overrun, leaving B Battery's left flank open.

German tanks drove into F Troop's position, showering them with H.E., armour-piercing and machine-gun fire. The Troop replied vigorously, but found it almost impossible to see their targets through the driving sand. As each piece opened, its flash, in the falling light, marked it for the hull-down German tanks, who picked off the guns one by one.

Lieut. Jack Kemp, the Troop's newly-appointed G.P.O., fell badly wounded. Sergeant Deakin was killed—but the Troop stood their ground until every gun had been knocked out. Major McDermid, directing A Battery from a *bir* just behind the battered guns, fired a smoke screen to enable the gunners to withdraw.

Major Hopkins, in his armoured car, dashed forward to rescue them and succeeded in so doing. A few moments later he was killed by an armour-piercing shot. This brilliant officer, who had not long since earned a bar to his Military Cross won in France, had only the day before received his promotion. His comrades, deeply conscious of their loss, buried him 1½ miles north of the Troop position.

Shielded once more by A Battery's smoke screen, E Troop's quads raced up. One gun and its quad were destroyed by direct hits as they limbered up. The other three, and all the gunners, were brought out safely.



The Acroma Gap
(Reproduced—as is the sketch on page 53—by kind permission from the Royal Artillery Commemoration Book.)

(Drawn by Major R. C. Croxton)

While B Battery, what was left of them, withdrew for two miles —not too exhausted to put a section sharply into action as soon as they reached their new position—A Battery maintained unceasing fire, holding the enemy back and knocking out several tanks. Captain Robin Dunn directed their fire until he was hit and his tank damaged. Then Major McDermid leapfrogged his guns back. Two were hit and badly damaged. F Sub had its breechblock jammed with the heat of so much firing. They left behind a ring of burning enemy tanks to shew what their day's work had been.

Here is Major Armstrong's account of the day's closing scenes:[6]

"The sun began to sink and get red. The C.O. asked over the air if we were all right. We replied, of course we were, and we could certainly hold them up till dark so long as ammo lasted. He said we might stay, but warned us that our friends on the left and right had been withdrawn, leaving us sticking out a bit, even if not cut off.

"Just before dark about 30 tanks moved up slightly to our left, followed a little later by some 20 more. We saw them halt and men get out of them. Then some drove forward to the attack. They couldn't see our guns, but they smartened up the O.P.s a bit. At 3500 yards we got on to the tanks, which were very close together. We gave them bursts of 10 rounds gunfire (80 shells at a time). After the third there were three burning.

"Then it got dark. The B.C. ordered: '10 rounds gunfire on last target. Fire by order. Withdraw 360° when you've shot'. By the light of burning tanks it was possible to see men moving about. We waited 10 more minutes and then gave them 10 more rounds flat out, that is, another 80 rounds, plus Easy Troop who had by now joined in . . . A wandering 109 had ripped open a moving quad, wounding Sergeant Whitby and Gunners Preston, Watson and Browell. Browell we took to be dying. He had a ghastly face wound, a bullet having shattered his jaw and removed one eye. But he lived; they made him a new jaw, and by wonderful skin-grafting a new face.

"Now came the reaction and terrible battle tiredness . . ."

Several decorations were won that day. Major Maclaren, commanding E Battery's Troop in the composite Battery, engaged a dozen Mark IV tanks in the early morning at close range. A Honey tank beside him was destroyed by three direct hits, leaving his

Honey alone, target for several enemy tanks. Maclaren stuck where he was, encouraging his gunners to such effect that the enemy halted, with two Mark IVs on fire and others damaged.

When the Worcester box was overrun, he went forward in his O.P. and picked up 30 infantrymen—there was no ban on strap-hangers on this bus. His trip saved them from capture; and it won him the Military Cross.

Captain Thomson-Glover, already noted for his conduct a week back, earned the same award acting as Gun Position Officer while E Battery engaged 15 enemy tanks. He took them on with individual guns. Three direct hits were the result. Ordered to withdraw, he saw all his guns out—but only after putting down smoke to help the Anti-Tank guns to safety.

Bombardier G. T. A. Knight, E Battery's cook, came up of his own accord to take over, as No. 1, a gun whose detachment were wounded. He fought the gun, bandaged the wounded, made his way under heavy fire to the next gun for water, and when ordered to retire brought his gun out, wounded and all. His change of occupation won him the Military Medal.

The Regiment had done what they were told to do. They had held off the enemy till nightfall. Now, under cover of darkness, it was their turn to withdraw.

Thus ended the Battle of Knightsbridge. From the point of view of generalship, it was a classic example of how a battle should not be fought. It ended in defeat—but not decisive defeat. True, Rommel could number his captures in men and vehicles by the thousand, in tanks and guns by the hundred; but (as anglers put it) "you should have seen the ones that got away". 8 Army as an entity were neither captured nor destroyed. They extricated themselves, as will presently be seen, and "lived to fight another day".

Credit for this is due entirely to the subordinate commanders: to the resource of unit officers, acting on their own initiative in lieu of orders, on their own perception in lieu of official intelligence; and to the dogged resistance of their men who, running the gauntlet for 300 miles, fought their way back to the point of no retreat, whence they were to debouch, a few months hence, as an invincible army.

There were many tributes, then and later, to the way 11 Regiment fought at Knightsbridge; of which one of the most prized was this:

H.Q. 2 Armoured Brigade,
Middle East Forces.
21 June 1942

The Viscount Galway, P.C., G.C.M.G., D.S.O., O.B.E.,
Colonel Commandant, Honourable Artillery Company.

Dear Colonel,

Period 27 *May*—15 *June* 1942

I thought I would like to let you know how magnificently 11 (H.A.C.) R.H.A. fought with my Brigade for 20 continuous days. The courage of every gunner was beyond reproach and the skill of Battery Commanders and Troop Leaders was worthy of the best tradition of the R.H.A.

The determination to win was never missing and the example of F Troop, on 14 June, who kept in action till every piece was hit, will go down in the annals of your Company history.

I am more than proud to have had them under my command and their comportment has been an example to the Brigade Group.

Yours sincerely,

RAYMOND BRIGGS.

"I take off my hat to those R.H.A. chaps", wrote an officer of 9 Lancers, describing the moment in the Knightsbridge battle when the 70 tanks of his Regiment, with E Battery in support, faced 100 enemy tanks on one side, 70 on the other.

"It was not so bad for us, sitting in our tanks. But there they were out in the open, in a perfect hail of shells and bullets, loading and firing their guns as coolly as if they were at drill."

That pioneer of armoured warfare, Lieut.-General Sir Giffard Martel, in his book "Our Armoured Forces", has this to say of the Regiment's part in the battle:

"Although we suffered a severe defeat, there was some magnificent fighting and great devotion to duty by the armoured forces and all the other arms. The gunners deserve special mention . . . 11 R.H.A., who fought with 2 Armoured Brigade throughout all the fighting, achieved a wonderful record. They had 20 officers and 210 other ranks killed or wounded and only five officers and 17 other ranks were missing during the fateful period . . . That shows the spirit in which they fought."

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIXTEEN

[1] See page 27.

[2] Later awarded the Victoria Cross at Alamein.

[3] The gallant Frenchmen could not have held out so long but for the R.A.F., who took them especially under their wing. Alan Moorehead, in *A Year of Battle*, describes how, on one occasion, our airmen caught a squadron of Stukas just as they were about to bomb. Twenty-two were sent crashing to the ground. General Koenig radioed delightedly "Merci pour la R.A.F." The R.A.F., equally pleased, signalled him in reply, "Merci à vous pour le sport". Again and again Bombays ran across Bir Hacheim in the darkness and parachuted down drugs and bandages, spare parts and petrol, small arm ammunition and grenades.

There were two women in the garrison. They had gone down to drive staff cars and act as secretaries. Now they became nurses and stretcher-bearers. One of them, Susan Travers, drove the General out when the Box was abandoned. Colonel Broche, who had commanded the column in whose support H Troop had made their gallant stand (see page 58), was killed in the withdrawal.

[4] A spectator at this stage of the battle was a very senior member of the Company, Lieut.-Colonel (afterwards Brigadier) R. Ogier Ward, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C. (B Battery 1915-16), the Senior Surgeon of the Middle East Forces. He spent several days with the Regiment, sleeping in his old Battery's gun line and accompanying Captain Dunn and Captain Bolton as a passenger in their Honey O.P. He gives some illuminating glimpses of desert warfare:

"I was very struck with the perfect liaison between all arms. The Bays and the Rifle Brigade are Regiments which are probably inclined to be critical, but they certainly had no complaints to make about A Battery. On the contrary, here was clearly a perfect mutual understanding; no need for laborious explanations; each understood what the other could and could not do. Movements were prompt and skilfully co-ordinated.

"A Battery had a great opinion of these Regiments, and those of their officers with whom I spoke were full of praise for the horse gunners working with them . . .

"Plenty of blankets were given me, and a large tarpaulin over everything to keep off the soaking dew of the night. The ground was stony, but I remembered that Pilgrim in his Progress had found that a stone could make an adequate pillow . . .

"On 11 June reveille was at 0500 hours; the moon was in the last quarter and Venus was shining brilliantly. Everything was drenched with dew and a dog belonging to Geoff Armstrong (a Bedouin bitch who had attached herself to the Battery on the first day of Knightsbridge and who was killed, with Lance-Bombardier Whittingham, a few days later) was the only being that seemed really awake . . .

"I had realised what a hard time it was for these troops . . . As no fires can be lit at night, it is no easy matter to serve a hot meal all round, since by day dispersal of units is essential. It seemed to me that a travelling cooker would be a most valuable addition to regiments of artillery. (See page 91.)

"As it was, most people seemed to drink large quantities of tea and eat very little. Each group boiled its own water over a fire made of scraps of scrub stimulated by petrol, a method which I know from experience maintains a steady supply of burnt patients into the hospitals.

"Now were spoken the only cross words during those days. A truck came up, so that the driver could make a report to Armstrong, and halted smartly with one wheel resting on his steaming kettle. This made him quite cross, and I doubt if he would have spoken more strongly had it been the Regimental Colours which were thus defaced . . .

"They all looked the picture of health and good for anything . . . They were all by now veteran soldiers."

[5] Major Blacker, veteran of Dunkirk and of Greece—where he had already won the D.S.O.—survived Knightsbridge, to be wounded at Alamein, and later to command a Field Regiment in Normandy, where he was killed in July 1944.

[6] In the Royal Artillery Commemoration Book.

17. RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

June—July 1942

The aftermath of Knightsbridge began, for the Batteries, on the night of 14/15 June, when they fell back over the Acroma escarpment. E Battery were lucky and were able to use the one negotiable track. A and B Batteries, marching by night with the Regiment's Tactical Headquarters, found themselves faced with a sheer drop littered with giant rocks and boulders. "Impassable", signalled the Rifle Brigade officer sent ahead to choose a route. But there were German forces on three sides of them. It *had* to be passable.

It was now that the will power of the Battery Commander triumphed over seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Gunners with picks and shovels hewed a path down the rock face to the narrow gully below, only to find a sheer cliff confronting them on the farther side. Undaunted, the drivers engaged bottom gear and by a feat of magnificent driving bucketed their vehicles—some of them towing "lame ducks"—up a climb so steep that, as they reached the top, their bonnets were silhouetted against the sky. With many a broken spring they reached the coastal plain—not a vehicle missing.

German tanks, pursuing them along the escarpment, harried them with shell and machine-gun fire. One Bofors gun, at the foot of the ridge, stuck in soft ground. Captain de Boinville at once drove back to it, dismounted from his tank, coolly fixed a tow rope under heavy fire, and hauled gun and detachment to safety. This was one of the many exploits which earned him the Military Cross.

Even when they found the eastward road packed with retreating troops and transport, the Regiment could not believe that the moment would not shortly come when they would make another stand. Before they reached Tobruk they received the wireless message from Brigade "Be a good soldier". It was the code for "Go east". Reluctant and incredulous, they signalled their position. Brigade's reply was unequivocal. "We are very much better soldiers than you are".

So through Tobruk, therefore, they continued their way till, leaguering at Gambut, they had their first real sleep for more than 40 days. Nothing loth, they left the teeming coast road next morning, setting course for the Sheferzen gap in the frontier minefield through which, 180 days back, they had eagerly and hopefully speeded to battle.

So far their withdrawal had been virtually unmolested, though there had been warning of a German tank column moving parallel with them to the south; indeed their last vehicles had barely cleared the Gambut airfield when it came under fire.

Their freedom from air attack they owed, as they well realised, to the magnificent umbrella provided by the R.A.F., without which the throng of vehicles struggling east along the coastal road must have been an easy prey.[1] But the enemy's ground forces—where were they?

One night's leaguer east of the frontier wire, and the Regiment were ordered north—to the beach, with time for a delicious bathe; then into Sollum, where it had been decided to make a stand. Here B and E Batteries were, for the time being, merged.

Thanks to some Cairo "commentator" whose optimism throughout the battle and retreat was only equalled by his ignorance, the British public were fed, and the fighting troops "fed up", with the B.B.C. announcement that they had fallen back to "prepared positions". Actually Sollum had neither minefield nor wire. Gun-pits were non-existent.

There followed three days of digging and maintenance. Then, by way of explanation of the absence of German pressure, came the news, stupefying, incredible, that Tobruk had fallen. Rommel, with his two Panzer and one Italian armoured divisions and five divisions of Italian infantry—somewhat worn and dented but still formidable—was free to strike again.

Sollum, then, was no place for a stand. It must be Mersa Matruh. The Regiment did not particularly mind where, so long as they made a stand *somewhere*. So little were their tails down that, on leaving Sollum, Sergeant Smith of E Battery could not resist leaving a life-like booby trap behind. It led—as the Germans would find when they approached it with due care—to an empty cartridge case labelled "Dangerous". On the back of the label was the cheering (if not entirely truthful) announcement: "The R.A.F. caused 25,000 casualties in their recent raid on Cologne".

Into Matruh the Batteries went on the night 24/25 June, just in time for an air-raid, which caused some casualties. Two days of digging and laying of mines; then General Auchinleck intervened. He had come up to take personal charge of 8 Army. With the memory of Tobruk still rankling, he was determined that the Army should on no account be shut up in Matruh. There was a clear-out of generals; and the Batteries were ordered east, along a road thronged with retreating men. Columns of smoke marked where the Luftwaffe—dodging for the moment the R.A.F. escort—had set vehicles on fire, choking still further the cumbered road.

Survivors will long remember the nightmare march through the dark towards a rendezvous of which they knew only one thing—sounds of battle and flashes of gunfire ahead shewed that the enemy were already there. Rommel had indeed by-passed Matruh with his main armour, while Italian infantry pressed westwards into the town and the Ariete division barred the southward Siwa track. In the dark both figuratively and literally, the two Batteries, now transferred to the command of 151 Brigade (50 Division), could only leaguer in their tracks and see what daylight would bring.

Dawn on 27 June revealed a perilous position. The Batteries were on a ridge some 10 miles south-east of Matruh, in full view of two German leaguers who promptly turned on them with 105-mm., firing over open sights. A quick move behind an escarpment and in a few minutes the Batteries, glad to be in action again, were handing out vigorous punishment, destroying a good number of vehicles, silencing several guns. Nevertheless the British forces, in their present disorganised and depleted state, were in no posture to save Mersa Matruh from encirclement or to stem the enemy's eastward progress.

That night the gunners were ordered on what was described as a "leaguer-bursting raid"; A Battery in the invigorating company of 6 Durham Light Infantry and their gallant commander Lieut.-Colonel Sammy Battiscombe. B/E's allotted unit appeared to have lost touch, and the Battery's next news of them was that they had been overrun and the bulk of them were "in the bag".

A Battery leading, they moved up a small escarpment and drove straight through between two enemy leaguers. By all the probabilities both Batteries should have been wiped out, for the enemy opened up with Breda and Anti-Tank guns on fixed lines. Streams of tracer passed in coloured arches overhead. As usual at night, the Italians were firing high; only three vehicles were damaged. Gunner Goltenboth was killed when Sergeant Godden's quad received a direct hit and went up in a sheet of flame.

When they paused for breath the Batteries found that they had indeed broken clear of the enemy's ring; but they were out of touch with the infantry; the Batteries themselves were split, and the whole of A Echelon was missing. Captain McAllum set out to find it. He found an enemy liaison officer complete with Volkswagen, and a German field cooker,[2] but no echelon.

Two hours' halt, and the astonishing order came that the Batteries were to return, through the same enemy leaguers whose night's rest they had rudely disturbed, back to the position outside Matruh's defences from which they had started.

This time the enemy were wide awake. Limbering up again, the gunners threaded their way again beneath triumphal arches of coloured tracer. Again, casualties were surprisingly few. In a few hours scattered parties had joined up in the old position—among them McAllum's. On his way back from the raid he was captured by loot-seeking Arabs, but before they could cut his throat, R.S.M. Dowdney had intervened in that *lingua franca* which the British soldier has used with effect throughout the world: that is, English spoken loud and clear. "Officer NOT Jarman", he explained; and McAllum was freed—just as well, as he was carrying the Battery funds.

Without respite, the gunners, red-eyed from lack of sleep, remained in action till dusk on 28 June, facing south-east, where enemy pressure was particularly heavy. Among their casualties that day was 2/Lieut. Bob Leftwich, killed by a shell splinter on A Battery's gun position. He had joined from the Cairo OCTU only two months before.

By now the enemy had penetrated to the sea east of Matruh. Orders came for a second breakout—south, then east to Fuka.

At 2100 hours the composite B/E Battery under Major Armstrong mounted the coastal escarpment, in front of the position they had held all day. Ahead of them moved a depleted company of the East Yorks under Lieut.-Colonel Guy Stansfeld (Green Howards).

Desperate though it was, there was an exhilaration about the second break-out which all ranks shared. Colonel Geoffrey Armstrong, writing in 1950 in the Royal Artillery Commemoration Book, recaptures the spirit of it:

"We soon blessed the fate which had put us with Colonel Stansfeld and his men. They cared not a fig for the enemy in front.

" 'Show the bastards the bayonet and our Brens', their Colonel urged them, 'and we'll burst through them'. Then to the gunners 'Keep your stuff together and push straight through'.

"We began to top the ridge, moving as silently as possible. There was a single shot. I thought of it as the starter's pistol, as the first lorry hood shewed . . . and then hell broke loose. They knew we were coming, and were ready for us. The Colonel gave the word to his men to debus, to deploy, to fan out and to advance with Brens at the hip. Those infantry were magnificent. They went right in without a pause, firing steadily, right for the enemy weapon pits. The Colonel watched for a moment or two, then sized up the situation and leaned from his carrier across to my truck.

" 'Gunner, I've got to direct from here and I've got no officer to lead them through. You must take my carrier platoon through. Take my carriers on each side of your truck. Crack through with your battery behind you. Go two miles and get clear. Stop, hold a bridgehead and we'll collect on you. Good luck'.[3]

"I knew every driver would follow me as he had the night before. I gave the signal and went forward at carrier pace, with compass set at 180° in one hand, revolver in the other and shouting blue murder at the top of my voice. At once we seemed to be among them. Tracer flew in all directions from a score of flashes of light, A.P. rushed past our ears or kicked up the sand, the Brens from the carriers on either side clattered and flashed. Boche rose from the ground and scattered from our path. We ran them down—or over.

"I took pot shots at Huns . . . Bullets seemed to pour through quads or bounce at angles from the wheels . . . I was never so excited in my life.

"We ran our two miles and pulled up while others came in. We found a Boche column in leaguer on our flank, raked it with fire and withdrew. Slowly our nerves relaxed, we began to laugh. We were alive again.

"Presently a shape loomed up ahead, the square shape of an ambulance, with a carrier not far away. We dismounted and approached, to find a doctor and his orderly and a shadowy figure which shrank away. The orderly whispered 'We're in the bag—

there are four more Boche sleeping by that carrier'. We quickly bagged the shadowy figure and then gave the carrier a burst of Thomson and a longer burst of invective. Four sleepy Huns awoke and looked into our barrels.

"By now my driver had passed out, utterly exhausted, and I had to drive, navigate and lead. I had a wounded South African from the carrier beside me, a stretcher case shot right through the chest, the doctor and his orderly, one corpse-like driver, my operator and two of the prisoners loaded up behind.

"We turned east and presently observed an army of tanks moving parallel on our left in the moonlight. Boche! We could not mix it with them but we must pass them, and not so suddenly as to arouse suspicion. Behind me was my long snake of guns, trucks, carriers and lorries. We edged slowly away, putting on speed. An armoured car detached itself and came across to investigate. He got so close I could pick out the long peak of the commander's cap. We played the idiot boy and took no notice. He had no suspicion and I edged the column farther and faster to the south out of sight and range.

"It was the third night without sleep. My eyes would not stay open nor would they inform my brain as to what they saw. All around the open Desert appeared to be covered with a confusion of guns, vehicles, tanks and crashed aircraft, the objects one had been seeing and imagining for weeks past. I could no longer tell fact from fancy.

"We halted to brew up and that put life into us. At the coast road I knew Fuka to be to our left or west but the country seemed strangely quiet for 'behind the lines'. I tossed up mentally and 'Tails' decided me to ignore my orders and cast right or east.

"It was well we did so, for two miles saw us looking at the muzzles of our own armoured car screen, shortly to be engaged in a bloody battle with the very tanks we had run past in the night. Fuka was no longer a possible rendezvous."

Under the cross fire a good many men and vehicles were lost. Sergeant Knight's gun and quad were knocked out, but by a pretty piece of driving he dragged them clear with tyres blazing.

Sergeant Potter and his detachment were captured. So was Captain Green, the Adjutant—the latter as he tried to bring away a wounded man. Captain Sewell had the newly-won Volkswagen smashed under him.

"The bag" seemed wide open for Thomson-Glover. Instead he captured a German Dodge 8-cwt. and a quad, besides destroying two 3-tonners; and driving through an enemy leaguer managed to rejoin.

Heavy toll was taken of A Battery, last to leave the beleaguered post. Major McDermid, whose cheery voice had ridden the storm as he jockeyed his troops along, was seriously wounded in the eye.

The loss of John McDermid was a bitter blow to the Regiment; his separation from the Regiment was a bitter blow to him. He had embarked with them; under him they had fired their first rounds in war; his resolution had inspired them in many tight places. It had been his secret ambition one day to command the Regiment—an ambition which, but for his wound, might well have been achieved.

Denied this by the fortune of war, he was destined instead, as an instructor of cadets, to play no inconsiderable part in moulding future Royal Artillery officers in the gunner's tradition of which he was a shining exponent.

Major Howard Bourne, commanding 239 Anti-Tank Battery, was badly hit, dying the next day in enemy hands. Brother officers who mourned his loss pictured him not only as a stout desert fighter but as a doughty champion in pre-war camps (he had joined B Battery in 1926) at wrestling on horseback; a good comrade.

Two of Major Bourne's officers, 2/Lieut. R. H. Macdonald and Lieut. A. F. Worthington, were killed. Captain Pearson (A Battery), Lieuts. M. M. Crocker (B Battery), J. T. Philp (A), K. D. Bangham (B) and G. C. Tills (A) were cut off and captured:[4] as were Battery Sergeant Majors Dodds, N. Hodgson, Isherwood and Biggs. Lieut. H. C. Henchman, the Signals Officer, was wounded, and casualties among other ranks were pretty severe.

Captain de Boinville, who was in the thick of it, set down some spirited impressions of the double break out. "Dear old Christchurch (my Honey tank with 99 lives) had to do a lot of towing . . . The journey through enemy leaguers was little short of a miracle. We were shot at by everything, and never have I seen such a firework display . . . The group moved steadily on like a convoy. The drivers and N.C.O.s of our Battery stood out. They were incredibly cool. Though I could see machine-gun bullets bouncing off wheels and pouring through quads, they never lost station, but all came steadily on . . ."

That was the first breakout. Of the second:

"Our route was up the one winding and very rough track to the top of the escarpment . . . Several lorries were blazing away merrily just over the lip, silhouetting every vehicle that came over . . . Perhaps I am being romantic but, seeing vehicle after vehicle hit and the occupants killed or wounded in the light of the damned burning lorry on the edge, I felt that the greatest moment of my life had come. C Troop was going to get through."

As the sadly reduced column made its way east along the coast road, who should appear but General Auchinleck himself? He stopped Major Armstrong, with a word of cheery congratulation on the Battery's march discipline even in such trying times. "It was coming down the road damn well", said the General. "I thought there might be some bargin' ahead."

Few things could have done more to put the troops' tails up, at that moment, than the sight of the Auk, cool and confident.

"Do they look like a beaten army to you?" he asked Armstrong. The reply was in the H.A.C. spirit. "Of course not."

General Auchinleck had said he would stand at Alamein, with the Mediterranean on his right and the virtually impassable sand sea of the Qattara depression on his left. And there he stood.

Thrice Rommel, indomitable still after a 280-mile advance, attacked. General Auchinleck invoked "a supreme effort on the part of all of us". 11 Regiment, utterly exhausted though they were, were called on to take part in this; to form a composite battery (all that the remnants of the Regiment could provide).

Major Armstrong found himself the senior officer present, and had to answer for the Regiment. Ready by dawn next morning? No. That was impossible, but he would have the Battery ready by noon—11 Regiment's remaining six guns; one 25-pounder from 50 Division; a light anti-aircraft troop; part of a 2-pounder anti-tank troop.

Officers and men, craving nothing but a few hours' rest, turned to once again, repairing guns and vehicles, loading food and petrol and ammunition almost in their sleep. At noon precisely they marched. Those who were in the composite battery long recalled with pride this testimony that, after weeks of battle, the H.A.C. still had a kick left. It would be fitting that all their names should be put on record. These at all events, were their leaders:

Major G. R. Armstrong, Battery Commander; Captain J. H. McAllum, Battery Captain; Captain G. N. P. C. de Boinville, Captain R. N. Smith, Lieut. J. P. Thomson-Glover, Lieut. B. H. S. Laskey, Lieut. R. L. Trapnell, Lieut. J. A. F. Sewell, joined later by Captain K. E. Bolton, with the M.O., Captain John Martin, and Padre, the Rev. "Ken" Oliver, Battery Sergeant Majors Butt, Kay and Eldred, Battery Quartermaster Sergeant Singleton.

Their task was to support Robcol, an impromptu battle group fashioned out of remnants of 10 Indian Division. Under command of Brigadier R. P. Waller, they were to stop the 15-mile gap, around Ruweisat Ridge, between the South Africans on the coast and the New Zealanders, brought down from Syria in a breakneck rush, who held the southern end of the line.

Major Armstrong's orders, as he moved up, red-eyed and somewhat shaken with fever, were "The Boche is breaking through and there is nothing between here and Alexandria. Take your Battery 15 miles due west, march to the sound of gunfire and report to Brigadier Rob Waller, who wants every gun he can get."

As the Battery arrived on Robcol's right, their Commander had speedy evidence of the tough task before him, for while he was reporting the Brigadier's driver had his legs shot away. The Battery swung into action, firing 600 rounds before dusk.

As night fell they retired a few miles to leaguer, as was the Column's wont; but next day the H.A.C. refused to conform to this habit, so happy were they with the well-covered gun position they had found. "We now have the best seats, both for guns and O.P.s, and can turn the tables on the enemy in the morning."

It was the technique of the hull-down position, which they had practised so often but not always had the chance to apply: finding a saucer with a 1000-yard crest. Thus sited, the enemy could neither creep up close to machine-gun them, nor stand off and outrange them. So they sat where they were—guns in action and pointing in the right direction—and in the morning, when the Panzers advanced, they "shot hell out of them".

He had barely settled his men and guns into position, when Armstrong had to give way to the M.O.'s orders and threats.

OPPOSITE

"Do they look like a beaten army to you?"

General Auchinleck and Major Armstrong.

He was evacuated, but no further than the Brigade aid post, with an astronomic temperature. It was, however, a bout of fever noteworthy in medical history, for within 48 hours he had declared that he had shaken it off, and was back with his Battery.

For a fortnight more a mobile battle swung to and fro, as the enemy armour frittered itself away in front of Ruweisat Ridge. Its grand finale came on 17 July, when, repulsing the final German attack, H.A.C. Battery fired 12 rounds gunfire seven times over. The gunners felt they were getting their own back.

They were indeed. His fruitless assaults cost the enemy 3000 prisoners, and brought his morale to a low point. One German box, to which Captain Bolton was about to direct attention, surrendered to his O.P. before the infantry arrived, 164 prisoners giving themselves up. (The feat was celebrated that night in the M.O.'s "blood-wagon".)

On 16 July Captain de Boinville, probably for the first time in war, called for air support from his O.P., and had the satisfaction of seeing the answering aircraft unload their bombs, 30 minutes later, on the target in front of him.

But if the men were on their toes again, their guns were nearly worn out. A flash-back caused several burns.

This little battle—fought exultantly while Britain, at the news of the retreat, was plunged into deep gloom; when smoke pyres dotted over Cairo shewed where Staff departments were burning their secret papers "in case . . ."—was in some sense the turning point of the war. 8 Army had made their last ditch stand. Egypt was saved.[5] Thereafter until the end of the war no Battery of the Regiment ever withdrew.

Despite shell fire and a good deal of dive-bombing, the Battery's casualties were light: three wounded—Captain Robin Smith and two other ranks.

The fight won for the Regiment the warmest compliments. "The best trained battery I have ever seen", said Brigadier Waller, bidding good-bye to Major Armstrong. He had relied exclusively, he said, on the correct information of the Battery's O.P.s for all his plans: "and I hope I shall have the honour to serve with the H.A.C. again".

Now at last, on 18 July, the code word came—"Monster Aunt Sally". It meant that 11 Regiment were to go back to the Delta

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OPPOSITE

Field-Marshal Lord Gort, V.C., Colonel Commandant, H.A.C. 1943-46.

to rearm and re-form. For 57 days they had been in action almost continuously. They had lost nine officers killed or died of wounds; 18 wounded, and 10 prisoners. Sixty-eight other ranks had been killed or died of wounds; 159 wounded. Two hundred and one had been made prisoners, practically all having been cut off in the break-out from Mersa Matruh.

Almost the saddest loss of all occurred later. Fifty-three other ranks, mostly of B Battery, were drowned at sea as prisoners of war, when the transport taking them to Italy was sunk by our submarines.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

[1] The R.A.F. continued to operate from their advanced landing grounds until the enemy were actually on them.

[2] Lieut.-Colonel Ogier Ward, in the letter already quoted (see page 87), had mentioned how useful a field cooker would be. Now they had one.

[3] Lieut.-Colonel T. W. G. Stansfeld was awarded an immediate D.S.O. for his courage and leadership in this action.

[4] Both Lieut. Bangham and Lieut. Tills made successful escapes.

[5] Mussolini had arrived at Derna on 29 June, complete with white charger for riding through Cairo. It would not now be required.

18. DELTA DISTRACTIONS

July—October 1942

Between Knightsbridge and Alamein the whole Army, and not least 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A., underwent sweeping changes. The battle was by no means over: or rather, a new battle had begun and ended.

In the July fighting, when the composite, or one might say patched-up, H.A.C. Battery under Major Armstrong were supporting Robcol, both sides were at the end of their tether. Two very different armies faced each other in the battle of Alam Halfa, fought (from 31 August to 5 September 1942) for possession of a ridge some 10 miles in rear of the British front line.

Malta, attacked with a fury and persistence exceeding anything she had hitherto known, was less able to interpose a barrier across Rommel's supply line. His Panzer crews and lorried infantry, who had reached Alamein almost delirious for lack of water, were back again on their luxurious ration scale. He had between 200 and 300 German tanks fit for battle—not counting the far less powerful Italian M.13s, known derisively by our troops as "self-propelled coffins".

General the Hon. Sir Harold Alexander had come out to take over the supreme command from General Auchinleck. The departing commander left behind him an imperishable and affectionate memory of calm confidence which rallied his troops the moment he appeared among them: but the coming campaign called for some fresh blood. 8 Army had devolved on General Gott, a legendary figure in desert warfare who might, the soldiers felt, have brought the disastrous Gazala battle to a different conclusion if its destinies had lain in his hands.

Reinforcements were now pouring in. "Strafer" Gott had foreseen with pin-point accuracy the plan Rommel would follow when he made the thrust he was bound to attempt before long, opening a way for Mussolini on his white charger to ride in triumph along Cairo's palmy boulevards. With equal precision Gott had determined where and how that thrust should be broken.

Almost on the eve of the battle he had been shot down while flying back from the forward area. He scrambled out of his aircraft uninjured, and was struggling with his customary courage to rescue the other occupants under machine-gun fire from the German attacker when a bullet put an end to a fine career.

Lieut.-General Bernard Montgomery, flown out at short notice, fought the battle of Alam Halfa in his stead.

Rommel's words to his troops spoke of "the final annihilation of the enemy". In a few days, he said, they would be in Alexandria. Montgomery's message to his was that there was nothing behind them. They must fight and win or die on their ground. They fought and won.

Rommel lost nearly 100 tanks. His appointments in Cairo and Alexandria were indefinitely postponed. But General Montgomery was not ready, yet, to do more than give his opponent "a bloody nose".

The all-out British offensive must wait—till the new divisions were in place and "at home" in their places; till the new weapons were practised with and understood; till the two new Corps Commanders, Lieut.-Generals Sir Oliver Leese and B. G. Horrocks, both adept in the use of armour, had "shaken down"; and—perhaps the most vital factor—until the leader of the smallest sub-unit knew, as he had never known before, the Army Commander's battle plan and the precise part, however small it might be, which he and his men were to play.

These months back of the line were indeed changed times for the H.A.C. There was the parade, solemn, immaculate, for the Cathedral service in memory of fallen comrades. There was leave. There was Cairo, with its florid delights; and later the more placid (but not always uneventful) joys of yachting on Lake Timsah, as, removed to the area of luxuriant Ismailia, the Regiment opened a new branch of the H.A.C. Yacht Squadron with local 14- and 18-footers.

Some glimpse, if it were needed, of the work the H.A.C.'s infantry and artillery training units were doing, out of the limelight, was afforded in the constant reunions with officers of all arms and services, who had done their military apprenticeship under the strenuous and devoted tuition of Company instructors at home.

Changes in personnel gave rise to vehement conflict with what the fighting troops were pleased to call "Groppi's Horse"[1] or the

"Short Range Desert Group"—the junior staff officers who seemed, to H.A.C. unit commanders, stubbornly unwilling or supinely unable to restore to the Regiment their recovered sick and wounded; but appeared to delight in posting reinforcements strange to H.A.C. standards and ways of life.

More grievous was the blow which fell on A Battery. Recent events had made it unlikely that Major Armstrong, who had been the mainstay of the Regiment since the loss of Major McDermid, would in future see eye to eye with the C.O.; and, having declined the post of Second-in-Command, Major Armstrong was posted away. He later rose to command a regiment and won the D.S.O. in the Burma campaign, where "with complete disregard to his own safety he was (the citation records) continually working ahead of the infantry to establish observation post screens . . . An inspiration to all ranks".

The remaining original officers of A Battery felt the manner of his departure so deeply that they all asked to be posted away. Their requests were acceded to, and A Battery at one stroke lost Captains de Boinville, Britton and Trapnell and Lieuts. Buchanan and Hobson, all experienced officers of proved gallantry and worth. The blow was equally keenly felt by the Queen's Bays, whom they had supported in so many stubborn engagements.

On 3 September Major P. J. A. Hankey arrived and assumed command of A Battery, and among the five other officers joining were two old members of the Company, Captain E. Dudley-Smith (B Battery, 1937) and Lieut. E. M. Stevens (D, 1939).

B Battery were still under the command of Major Maclaren, and Major Croxton, now recovered from his wound, had his old Battery (E) again.

Reluctant farewell was said too, during this pause between battles, to one who had been in turn, to all ranks, their ghostly adviser, their comrade in arms (though himself unarmed), their arbitrator in some awkward situations and their host—the Regiment's padre, the Rev. "Ken" Oliver, now promoted Senior Chaplain to 10 Armoured Division.

The strength of H.A.C. tradition, which changes in officer personnel had so severely tested, was demonstrated by the rapidity and completeness with which 350 miscellaneous other-rank reinforcements were absorbed. They had arrived after a long and unpleasant voyage—wearing topees, a headdress which the old hands had long discarded.[2] As quickly as their pale faces and white knees acquired, under the summer sun, the desert brown, they absorbed the traditions of the Regiment, under the firm but understanding guidance of the warrant and non-commissioned officers, to whom they, and the Regiment, owe no small debt.

More sweeping, even, than the changes in the Batteries' personnel was the change in their armament and their role in battle, when a legion of rumours hardened into the definite news that 11 Regiment had been selected as the first to take into battle the Priest, the new self-propelled gun.

If one single item can be said to have revolutionised the Libyan war it was this. No longer would gun detachments die round their pieces for lack of shelter from enfilading fire, nor guns be abandoned in scores, as they had been in the Cauldron, because their quads had been smashed by shell fire while trying to get them away.

Above all, no longer would British tanks meet almost inevitable destruction from dug-in 88-mm. guns. Now their own artillery, as mobile as they, could follow close behind them, opening fire from hull-down positions with no delay for unlimbering or digging gunpits. Moreover, with their flashless charges they had no longer to worry about flash-cover. This was the weapon the Army had long needed, and the Regiment were proud to be the first to use it.

Priests first arrived on 18 September 1942. They proved to be Grant tanks with the turret removed and a 105-mm. gun-howitzer installed, with protection for the detachment, and a sort of armour-plated pulpit mounting a Browning anti-aircraft gun. Under the approving eyes of generals from the Army Commander downwards, under tuition from experts of all kinds—R.E.M.E. craftsmen for maintenance, armoured cavalrymen for tank driving, American instructors for the transatlantic gadgets—the Regiment set about mastering their new weapons in the minimum of time.

There was a new language to be learned, as well as new technique. Sights were graduated, not in degrees but in mils. Dial sights became "panoramic telescopes"; directors became "aiming circles". Voice control, in the reverberating hull, was to give place to Tannoy loudspeakers.

One question, subject of much anxious debate, was resolved to the Regiment's unalloyed content. When they next went into battle it would be with their old comrades in arms of 2 Armoured

Brigade; more, their old Brigadier, now Major-General Briggs, would be their Divisional Commander.

The cavalry regiments, too, were sporting new armour—Sherman tanks, blending, in simplicity of mechanism and suitability for desert fighting, British and American ideas. Rather slower than the British Crusaders, they lacked also the Crusader's ability to "skid steer"; that is, by locking one track, to swing round on their own axis: a disability not so noticeable in the Desert, but one which was to prove a handicap in the narrow lanes of Europe. By way of generous compensation, however, the Sherman carried the long medium-velocity 75-mm. gun, whose range, hard hitting and armour-piercing shell made it a match for any German tank.

Training in Priests merged imperceptibly into training for the coming battle. It was a treat, somebody remarked, to be going into a battle that really was planned; and Alamein certainly was. Long before the Grand Design had been explained to the troops they had rehearsed their parts on sand models; not table models, but lifesize ones—stretches of desert on which units could thread their way through the minefields by channels lit with the hurricane lamps, and marked with the direction signs, they would use on The Day.

While thus they trained, plans were set in motion for one of the most elaborate and successful feats of camouflage in the history of war: not a "dummy" concentration, but a "dummy dummy" concentration laid out with minute regard to detail.

It was vital to General Montgomery's purpose to delude Rommel into the idea that his first and major thrust would be in the centre of the line; whereas he meant to deliver it in the north. Accordingly, a huge assembly of armour was concentrated behind the line, south of the Ruweisat ridge. A German reconnaissance aircraft flew over, duly noted it, and was fired on—with great care lest it should be hit. Then (locking the door after the horse had bolted, as the Germans thought) the armoured concentration was rather obviously camouflaged.

Meanwhile, in the north, a dummy lath-and-canvas concentration had been set up, with just that degree of amateurishness which reassured the German High Command, studying the reconnaissance reports, that it *was* a dummy.

Throughout the three nights preceding the battle, tanks from the southward concentration slipped away to the north, tucking themselves away under the dummy screens, raking the sand to eliminate tracks, keeping their crews well under cover.

It was obvious to the German airmen, flying over the southward assembly area, that the British armour was still there. The "stagecraft" tanks which the Sappers had made and substituted for the real ones as each detachment left, were good enough, it was said, to deceive the eye at 20 yards. Besides, there were the crews squatting around, brewing up, scattering their litter. (Well drilled "supers", from units not concerned, acted their parts commendably.) There were dumps, too, and pipelines, in course of preparation; but so slowly that the German High Command was assured they could not be ready before November.

Whether Rommel would have been deceived can only be a matter of conjecture. He was no great believer in the German intelligence reports: but there is no reason to think that even his eerie prescience of the enemy's intentions would have enabled him to penetrate a façade which deceived alike the German airmen and their commander.

Anyway, Rommel was not there. He was back in Germany in hospital, very sick. It was Hitler's intention that he should never return to Libya, to discover that the petrol he had clamoured for, which the Führer had promised, was not going to be forthcoming; still less the new *nebelwerfer*, the multiple mortar (our troops made its unpleasant acquaintance later in Tunisia); or the landing craft armed with 88-mm. guns which were to replace the more vulnerable tankers; or the massive reinforcements of men of which Hitler had assured him.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Groppi's was Cairo's favourite confectioners and gossip-centre.

[2] But see photograph facing page 96. The explanation of this apparent inconsistency is that (*a*) Major Armstrong's occasional wearing of a topee and (*b*) the well known and probably unique specimen he chose to wear were regarded with affectionate tolerance as further evidence of the sartorial eccentricity for which 8 Army were noted.

19. ALAMEIN[1]

October—November 1942

General Montgomery's ruse was a complete success. When the battle opened the blow fell on the German defence line from a quarter they by no means expected. General Stumme, who had replaced Rommel in command of the German forces, died of heart failure 24 hours after the attack began. Not until the third day of the battle did Rommel, eagerly accepting Hitler's invitation, arrive back in Africa; and by then the fight was lost.

Alamein remains, in military history, a unique battle for many reasons. It was fought virtually without any written orders: none, at least, were ever received by Regimental H.Q. or any of the Batteries. But on the afternoon of the eve of battle, 23 October 1942, all officers were called to Brigade Headquarters, where Brigadier "Fish" Fisher, the new Brigade Commander, outlined the plan. By nightfall every man knew precisely what General Montgomery intended to do, and what his own part in the operation would be. For the first time, the people who were going to fight the battle were "in the picture".

This was the picture:

From north to south, from the coast to the Qattara Depression,[2] the British forces faced the Germans across a double belt of minefields. Stretching back at right angles to the main German minefield (that is, running east to west) was another belt of mines. Its purpose, from the German point of view, was to prevent the British, if they were able to make a turning movement round the German right (southern) flank, from rolling up the defence line by a northward push.

General Montgomery had his eye on this minefield too: for if he punched through, as he intended, in the north, it would hamper the Germans in reinforcing their line and could be a danger to troops pinned against it. Thus the German defences were split into two groups: in the north, 15 Panzer, 90 Light and an Italian Armoured Division (Trieste); in the south 21 Panzer and Ariete Armoured Divisions. Forward positions in both sectors were held by German and Italian infantry.

Facing these were the Australians in the far north, then the New Zealanders, 51 (Highland) Division—with a score to settle—S. African, 4 Indian, 50 and 44 Divisions, a Greek Brigade and the Fighting French.

General Montgomery's intention was that lanes should be cleared through our own and the forward German minefields by Sapper patrols. Their uncanny sixth sense, born of long practice, which enabled them to detect buried mines as unerringly as a pig finds truffles, was now reinforced by a mechanical device, the Du Toit minesweeper, known—for security purposes, and because everything in the Army has to have a nickname—as the Flail or Scorpion. This was a tank to the nose of which was fixed, at a distance of some feet, an axle garnished with lengths of chain. As the axle turned the chains whirled round, hitting the earth with sufficient force to detonate a mine.

Through these lanes, lit by shielded hurricane lamps, marked by signs, silhouetted in tin, of the units which would use them (Sun, Moon and Star for our three Regimental Groups) and bordered on either side by streams of Bofors tracer, the infantry would attack, behind a barrage—more concentrated than had ever been known before—furnished by guns spaced one to each 23 yards of front. To this the Desert Air Force would add every variety of their striking power—fighter cover, close bombing support and strategic bombing in depth. Through the infantry, in turn, the British armour would pass—1, 7 and 10 Armoured Divisions, 4 Light Armoured Brigade and several Army Tank and independent brigades.

This time Britain's armoured strength greatly outnumbered that of their opponents. The enemy forces amounted to some 96,000, slightly more than half being German. They had 200 German tanks, and 300 Italian. 8 Army brought into the field some 150,000 men, with 200 Grants, 250 Shermans, and 600 other tanks gunned with 2-pounders except for 90 carrying 6-pounder guns.

2 Armoured Brigade (which, with 7 Motor Brigade, constituted 1 Armoured Division) were to go through 51 (Highland) Division: their task, to destroy the enemy armour and to seize Kidney

Ridge, almost the only feature to raise itself behind the enemy lines above the flat desert plain. A Battery with the Bays (Sun) would go in on the right; E Battery with 9 Lancers (Moon) in the centre, B Battery with 10 Hussars (Star) on the left.

When the first German minefield had been pierced, our Minefield Task Force, consisting of the Divisional R.E., with Military Police for traffic control, would tackle the second and third enemy minefields, protected by 2 K.R.R.C., who were to mop up enemy strong points, screen the R.E. and secure connection with Divisional H.Q.

This was the plan outlined to officers by Brigadier Fisher on the afternoon of 23 October 1942, and passed on to all ranks until every man knew the general design and the particular part he was to play.

Each armoured group had something special by way of an eve of Waterloo celebration.[3]

At 2000 hours that night the plan was put into action.

As the moon rose over the silent battlefield the columns moved out into single file on their respective tracks and halted. A single German aircraft flew overhead. In the silence, the beat of its engines was heard miles away; then the sudden whistle of a bomb. It fell near 2 Armoured Brigade Group. It did no damage; "only" (as Kenneth Bolton says in his account of the battle) "put everyone into a proper frame of mind".

Silence again until 2140 hours. Then the whole world suddenly exploded. "Flashes of flame" (Bolton's account again) "tore the sky from 800 guns." Twenty minutes later the infantry went in. Up through the medium guns, through the line of 25-pounders, the three tank columns moved, 100 yards apart, gunners waving them God-speed as they passed. Pausing to refuel, they churned forward again, kicking up a dust cloud through which the commanders stared with sand-encrusted eyes. Searchlights rose as "trig" points on which compass bearings could be taken. In the distance, the R.A.F. dropped hanging flares (the battle had indeed been planned).

Before the Batteries' guns were clear of the first minefield ambulances were darting back, stretcher parties carrying wounded, prisoners passing through, dazed and unkempt. As the leading tanks emerged from the second German minefield, 88-mm. shells began to fall among them.

They should, according to time table, have been through the third minefield by first light; but when dawn broke they were 500 yards short. Enemy anti-tank guns from the slopes of Kidney Ridge, field guns behind the ridge, were "firing into the brown" —the mass of British tanks, guns and vehicles packed between the German minefields.

Had the enemy artillery and air strength been equal to our own, the result might have been catastrophe. But it was not. The Germans, shattered by the barrage, the counter-battery fire, the bombing and the infantry attack, could not pin-point our gun positions. Shells fell indiscriminately as the Batteries blazed away, taking on troop targets, gunfire targets, individual enemy guns and the opposing infantry. It was more than half an hour before any of them could pick up their own shell-bursts. So thick was the confusion of dust and smoke that they were obliged to range by salvos.

There was only one way in which 11 Regiment's guns could deploy quickly enough to answer the armoured O.P.s' calls for fire. They simply turned off the track into the minefield. The risk, once accepted, proved astonishingly small, for not a single Priest or vehicle suffered any serious damage from the mines.

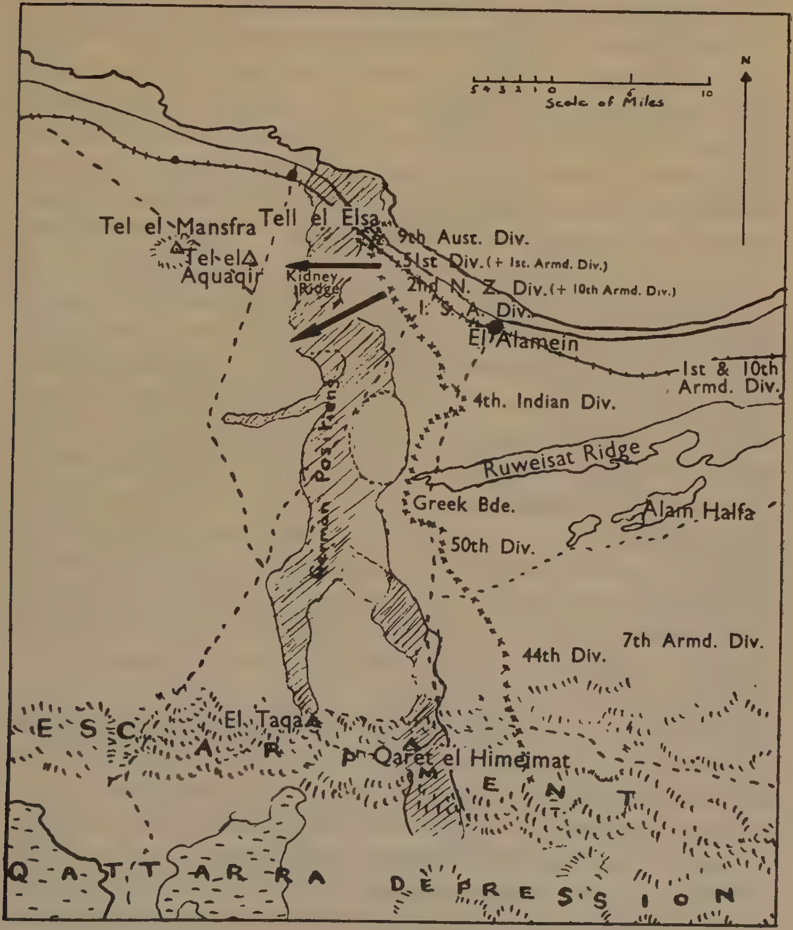
Here and there in the British lines a column of smoke rose from a burning tank or vehicle; but the slopes ahead were ringed with burning enemy armour.

Shaken though they were, the enemy had still plenty of fight in them. There were signs of a counter-attack against the Bays on the right. A Battery, charging forward, opened on the oncoming tanks at 3000 yards over open sights, closing to 1800.

Captain Dudley-Smith, observing in a very exposed position under heavy fire, had his armoured O.P. pierced by a 50-mm. shot. A moment afterwards a H.E. shell splinter entered his leg. In spite of his wound, which was bleeding continuously and causing great pain, he continued to direct the fire of his Battery. A shell hit the track of his O.P. and blew it off. He reported the incident and carried on till, in the darkness, the Germans drew away from the hail of fire, leaving a number of burning tanks behind. In this manner Captain Dudley-Smith earned the Military Cross.

That night the Highlanders, foiled in their first attempt to secure their final objective, went in with the bayonet, walking forward unperturbed as shells fell among them, finishing with a charge at the double over 800 yards of ground. Thus they captured the third minefield: but there proved to be two more behind, which caused our tanks some losses as they fanned out through the gap the Highlanders had made.

EL ALAMEIN


5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10
Scale of Miles
N
Tel el Mansfra
Tell el Eisa
Tel el Aqaqir
Kidney Ridge
9th Aust. Div.
51st Div. (+ 1st. Armd. Div.)
2nd N. Z. Div. (+ 10th Armd. Div.)
1. S. A. Div.
El Alamein
1st & 10th Armd. Div.
4th. Indian Div.
German Positions
Ruweisat Ridge
Greek Bde.
Alam Halfa
50th Div.
7th Armd. Div.
44th Div.
El Taqa
Qaret el Himeimat
ESCARPMENT
QATTARA DEPRESSION

The guns leaguered where they were, while the O.P.s stayed with their squadrons—a harassing night, with leaguers raked by machine-guns firing on fixed lines and bombed by J.U. 88s.

All next day (24 October) the Batteries fired incessantly, neutralising anti-tank guns and claiming considerable destruction among enemy tanks. Two men (Lance-Bombardier R. S. Williams, who had won his Military Medal at Knightsbridge, and Gunner J. Goldston) were killed. A Battery Commander's tank was blown up on a mine and Major Hankey and all his crew were evacuated wounded. Major L. Chrimes took over command of the Battery.

As the Regiment's fire had helped to frustrate the attack on the Bays, so to-day they brought to a standstill a thrust against 9 Lancers. Guns in all the Batteries suffered direct hits, the detachments shewing great bravery under gusts of fire. For although the gunners inside the Priests were protected by their armour, there were ammunition duties still to be done in the open.

Late in the afternoon five shells burst between two guns of B Battery. A No. 1 was killed and seven men wounded. Dashing through continuous shell fire Gunner Sidney Westwood carried two wounded men to safety, then returned to apply field dressings to two others. That done, he rallied a scratch detachment—though he himself had been rendered partially deaf—and fought the gun with vigour and determination, thus earning the Military Medal.

By now the two sides were locked in merciless in-fighting among the minefields. On the Brigade's left enemy tanks were attacking heavily. To draw them off, C Squadron 10 Hussars made a flank charge against an anti-tank position on Kidney Ridge under a smoke screen from 9 Lancers and the Bays, while the whole Regiment, firing on a joint plan with 2 and 4 R.H.A. and 78 Field Regiment, plastered the position.

Through the fourth minefield the Squadron charged. Six hundred yards from their objective they hit the fifth minefield and wheeled, finding a way round. B Battery's F.O.O. ordered a cease fire as the tanks went in; but as they stopped firing anti-tank guns opened in enfilade, knocking out five Shermans. The F.O.O. ordered down fire again, allowing the rest of the Squadron to withdraw safely. They had achieved their purpose, drawing off enemy armour from the left and putting several anti-tank guns out of action.

The Batteries were now using a new technique, perfected during their spell of training. They were shooting air burst, and bouncing H.E. shells to give a burst only a few feet from the ground—a particularly effective method for troops in slit trenches.

It was at this point, also, that use was first made of the American white phosphorus smoke. The Germans had a habit of firing a similar smoke into our lines as a guide and marker for their Stukas. Seeing what was happening, the Batteries always kept one gun loaded with smoke. When the F.O.O.s saw Stukas on the way the order "Stuka" was given over the wireless, the gun was fired and the troops had the great satisfaction of seeing the Germans bombing themselves. The astonishing thing is that this went on several times a day for at least a week before the Germans grasped that they were being hocussed.

That night Kidney Ridge was captured, and the Rifle Brigade, in one of the most brilliant actions of the battle, seized the neighbouring feature known as Snipe, their C.O., Lieut.-Colonel Victor Turner, winning the V.C. For two more days the Batteries moved forward step by step, causing havoc among the enemy's gun lines and infantry positions. The O.P.s were becoming accustomed, now, to call for air as well as gun support: keeping the 88-mm. guns quiet while the Boston bombers attended to the target they had indicated.

On the evening of 28 October, 2 Armoured Brigade, including the Regiment, were withdrawn rearwards of El Alamein for a short rest and refit.

Gunners flung themselves down and slept as the Priests halted. But it was to be a short rest indeed. Next morning, while crews busied themselves on maintenance, officers were called to Brigade H.Q. No one expected congratulations, but everyone was in high spirits. The Regiment had lost 50 killed and wounded, but they knew they had done their job. The Brigadier's first words came as a surprise.

"Gentlemen", he said, "the position is desperate." The Brigade were going in behind the New Zealanders in a fresh attack: objective, the line of telegraph posts and the enemy supply line north of Tel el Aquaqir. "The Brigade must reach this objective. We are prepared to accept 80 per cent. casualties—only our tanks must get there." There was a hint of high strategic purpose behind all this. What it was the Regiment learned a few days later, when it was announced that First Army had landed in North Africa.

The night 1/2 November was a replica of the first attack—the same white taped lines (but laid in a new direction, north of our previous line of attack), the same barrage. Through a slight mist the New Zealanders plodded forward, while the British tanks, surprising dug-in Italian M.13s, destroyed them in their pits. Troop covering troop, the three Regimental groups bounded forward. This was Operation Supercharge.

That day and the next the Batteries fought a battle that was a replica of the first attack. "Boston tea parties", called up by the O.P.s, joined in, but there were Stuka attacks, too, on no small scale. Several ammunition trucks were destroyed by bombing and the Regiment suffered a good many casualties. Captain S. A. G. Watt, who had transferred to A Battery as Troop Commander only the previous day, and was firing I Troop for the first time, was killed when his tank was pierced by a shell. Gunners E. W. Rogers, W. F. Walton and F. W. White were killed.

Major Croxton was hit, this time severely, when an A.P. shot pierced his tank, wounding him in the legs. He was eventually sent home. He had commanded E Battery with outstanding success since January 1941, except for the period when he was recovering from wounds received in the Knightsbridge battle. His two signallers, Bombardier Martin and Bombardier Kitchen, who had served with him since the formation of the Battery, were also wounded, and his driver, Gunner Malcolm, was killed. Captain J. P. Charles and Lieut. A. D. Simons were wounded; the latter fortunately was able to return to duty a week later.

The eleventh day of the battle, 4 November, saw our tanks across the telegraph lines. General Montgomery had said that if the offensive was maintained without respite the enemy could not last more than ten days. Columns of prisoners passing back from the front line, R.A.F. reports of streams of German transport hurrying westwards, proved his words true.

The Regimental groups leaguered that night where they had fought. Gunners woke to the whistle of 25-pounder shell falling on

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OPPOSITE

1. *Sergt. Dornton-Duff's gun at Aslagh.*
2. *Sergt. Knight's gun at Sollum.*
3. *F Troop's gun and limber at Tamar.*
4. *Gerry de Boinville in Christchurch, "the tank with the 99 lives" (5000 miles without track change or mechanical defect); with him L/Bdr. D. Oliphant, the Queen's Bays driver, and Gnr. J. R. Jackson.*
5. *Capt. J. W. Hopkins*(k).
6. *Ken Oliver, Roger Croxton, John McDermid.*
7. *Sidi Moussa, 1944. Quentin Drage*(k), *G. W. Clingan, J. O. Onslow, J. A. F. Sewell.*
8. *John McAllum*(k).

the start line, and in the morning mist, as the infantry breasted the slope to the plateau beyond, the Regiments broke through.

Six miles on—six miles strewn with the debris of a beaten army—the leading tanks crashed heavily into a rearguard of tanks and anti-tank guns. All three Batteries took up the challenge, firing round an arc of 120 degrees.

10 Hussars tanks knocked out a German Mark III which came alone over the sand dunes. The commander and crew baled out, but were pinned to the ground by H.E. bursts. Firing stopped, and a tall figure in black dungarees walked slowly towards the attacking tanks. He was evidently someone of importance, from the red and gold facings which adorned his uniform. Of special interest, he was wearing binoculars enormous even by enemy standards—and the Germans used binoculars twice as big as the British pattern, and much coveted.

Captain Kenneth Bolton, F Troop Commander, raced forward in his O.P. tank to get those glasses. Too quick for him, a Dingo scout car sped past. In it stood Captain Grant Singer, commander of 10 Hussars Reconnaissance Troop. As he stopped the tall, dark figure halted, saluted smartly and shook hands. He was General von Thoma, commanding the Afrika Korps in Rommel's absence.

He was sent back still wearing his binoculars; not without a word of heavy-hearted congratulation for his captors. The destruction of the anti-tank guns and armour on this section, he said, was the primary tactical cause of the German defeat.[4]

By night ten miles had been covered: before 0800 hours on the following day, another twenty. An hour's fight—with Major Butler-Stoney (now commanding E Battery since Major Croxton was wounded) directing fire on two hidden 88-mm. guns which had knocked out several of the leading tanks—and another enemy rearguard had been overrun.

Heading north, the Brigade had captured and left behind (not without securing some booty) several German supply lorries, a huge armoured workshop and, with bitter groans, the wreckage of the famous "Noah's Ark" NAAFI at Daba. R.A.F. trucks,

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OPPOSITE

TOP, LEFT: *Lt.-Col. H. C. ("Chink") Phipps, commanding 13 Regt. 1940-43.*

TOP, RIGHT: *Major G. R. Armstrong, B.C., A Battery, June-September 1942.*

LOWER, LEFT: *Lt.-Col. W. A. Ebbels, commanding 11 Regt. 1940-42.*

LOWER, RIGHT: *Lt.-Col. G. H. Champness, commanding 86 Regt. 1942-45.*

eager to establish forward airfields, mingled with the advancing tanks.

Through the night 6/7 November the Brigade swept on across the Desert, aiming to circle Mersa Matruh and crash into the rear of 90 Light Division near Charing Cross.

Then the weather, no small factor in war, took a hand. Deluges of rain halted a manœuvre which might have altered the entire desert campaign. Tanks ploughed slowly through deep mud, their crews' disappointment mingled with pity for the sodden column they passed—Italian prisoners, six deep, a whole division with the general marching at their head: part of the Italian forces marooned in the south of the battle line when the Germans seized all available transport to move their own men.

Slowly our armour floundered to a standstill for lack of petrol as the echelons struggled unsuccessfully to reach them. Supply lorries, bogged axle deep, stood in sight of the tanks they had come to fill, but could not get at them.

Foremost of the column, E Battery, with a squadron of 9 Lancers, just reached the edge of the plateau, to look down on the most exasperating spectacle since Moses surveyed the Holy Land from the top of Pisgah. Massed below them was the entire transport of 90 Light Division and other elements of the Afrika Korps, stranded, like themselves, for want of fuel; and neither Grants nor Priests had enough petrol in their tanks to take them down the escarpment, let alone manœuvre and fight. No wonder the Germans, alarmed at the sight of tanks silhouetted above them, signalled frantically for air support.

Their appeals were answered. E Battery and their accompanying squadron were severely dive-bombed, the Battery losing two killed and six wounded, with one Priest badly damaged.

During the night 7/8 November the rain abated, and supplies managed to struggle through. 2 Armoured Brigade, fired now by the race for Tripoli (since the B.B.C. had just reported the North Africa landing), brushed aside a light defensive screen, and 1 Armoured Division converged on the airfield twelve miles west of Mersa Matruh; but supplies had also reached 90 Light Division, and they were gone.

NOTES TO CHAPTER NINETEEN

[1] "As a military feat it surpasses anything that has ever been done in the history of the world. 8 Army advanced over 1400 miles and the average speed for this advance was 17½ miles a day . . . As an instance of what was achieved in transportation, during one week in a late stage of the advance over 3,000,000 gallons of petrol were delivered at the front and 8000 tons of ammunition." —*Our Armoured Forces*, by Lieut.-General Sir Giffard Martel, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

[2] The Qattara Depression, a large area of quicksands, was to all intents and purposes impassable, although some alarm was caused in high places when Major the Hon. R. Plunkett successfully led his Squadron of Guides Cavalry across and cast doubts upon the impregnability of this left flank.—*The Desert Rats*, by Major-General G. L. Verney, D.S.O., M.V.O.

[3] That of 10 Hussars may serve as typical of the true *sangfroid*. They sat down a little early, for a formal occasion; at 1800 hours (or, it would be more seemly to say, 6 p.m.); with B Battery's F.O.O.s among their guests. Many of the officers were in service dress. The meal, served in their large mess tent just behind the lines, was excellent; the wine in which the royal toast was honoured was choice. At the end of the meal, however, they did not adjourn to the ante-room. Colonel Jack Archer-Shee rose, lifted his glass and said : "Gentlemen, it is time we moved". He then turned to the mess waiter. "Silverside, catch us up when you can and—–damn it, man!—don't look at me like that." The officers of 10 Hussars then left the tent, mounted their tanks and drove off.

[4] Only two days later Grant Singer, bowling along in the pursuit, singing "A-hunting we will go" at the top of his voice, breasted a rise in his Dingo to meet instant death from an 88-mm. shell. His blend of gaiety and gallantry had endeared him to B Battery, who mourned a good comrade.

20. PAUSE FOR REFRESHMENT

November 1942—*March* 1943

Chafing at being left behind while 7 Armoured and 51 (Highland) Division took up the pursuit, 2 Armoured Brigade loaded their tanks and Priests on transporters and moved along the coast road to Sollum and up the winding Halfaya Pass.

From the summit streams of vehicles, three deep, could be seen stretching to the eastward horizon. Again they surveyed the battlefield of Knightsbridge, wreck-strewn as they had left it. Again a jeep from B Battery crossed the Acroma escarpment—just to confirm that it could be done—by the perilous way they had taken in the retreat.

As winter rains set in, 1 Armoured Division found themselves stationed for three months in a stretch of desert below Tmimi and Rotunda Afrag—but a desert transformed. Sudden valleys displayed their moist mantle of desert crocus, of anemones and red poppies. War-time leaguers blossomed into a residential estate of marquees and wooden structures—complete with fireplaces—interspersed with more humble canvas "woggeries". Sport and social life alternated with such hard training as could be done within the scope of a sternly restricted petrol ration.

Liaison prospered with the armoured regiments, who, keen to learn the secrets of artillery work, developed an obsession for indirect fire—until tank encounters encouraged snap-shooting again.

Luxuries that would have raised eyebrows at home marked the Batteries' celebration of Christmas 1942: turkeys from the Delta, beer, spirits, wine in abundance—even angostura and Plymouth gin. An interesting entry appears in the Regimental "war" diary for 23 December: "The following message received: 'The Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet will be shooting at duck (the modest "at" was duly noted) in the Bomba district. It is requested that all other sportsmen will refrain from shooting in this area'. All informed".

Early in the Tmimi period Lieut.-Colonel Leggatt handed over command of the Regiment to Lieut.-Colonel R. W. Goodbody. All who knew him of old, and indeed the entire Company at home and abroad from the Colonel Commandant downwards, were delighted to welcome back the former Artillery adjutant.[1] Major D. Morris also joined, taking command of E Battery.

For weeks the entire Regimental transport was commandeered for the arduous task of conveying General Montgomery's forward petrol supplies from Tobruk, now again a supply port, to Benghazi, whose harbour was blocked with wreckage from a record winter storm.

Seven times the drivers—"going like hell", as they said—covered the run, 250 miles each way, demonstrating that their standard of maintenance left nothing to be desired.

At last, in March 1943, the Regiment were on the road to war again, the road to Mareth. Eagerly though they raced forward, the C.O. urged them to still greater speed; pulling up beside the road, pumphandling his arm, exhorting drivers to "get the stick out". Now they had left the Desert behind. Wheels and tracks joined at Medinine, a pretty pre-war French garrison just short of the Mareth line, where five nights later a new phase of the North African war was due to begin.

NOTE TO CHAPTER TWENTY

[1] Few men have exercised a greater influence on the history of the Company. From the day he became Adjutant of the original Regiment in January 1936 Captain Richard Goodbody devoted himself, with the enthusiastic backing of Lieut.-Colonel Goldsworthy, his C.O., to persuading the authorities that the Artillery division of the H.A.C. must, in war, be allowed to function both as an officer-producing organisation and as a fighting unit. It needed persistent and vehement pressure. In conference after conference Goodbody wore down the War Office determination that, like the Battalion, the Artillery division should devote themselves entirely to the provision of officers for other units. He invited them to stipulate the number of officers they would require on mobilisation; guaranteed to supply them—and supplied them. At the same time he applied himself unsparingly to ensuring that, when mobilisation did occur, the authorities should have, ready to hand, three competent Artillery Regiments whose services, in a crisis, they could hardly decline. (13 Regiment were formed after Goodbody had relinquished his post as Adjutant.) As Brigade Major of 1 Support Group he was able to see how well his foresight had been justified. As an organiser of artillery training, he was later able to put to general use the methods he had perfected in the pre-war years. Rejoining as C.O. on 10 December 1942, he led the Regiment in the campaigns hereafter to be described. His promotion to the command of 2 Armoured Brigade in no way severed his ties with his beloved H.A.C., which continued after the war when he became G.O.C. 56 (London) Division, in which the re-formed Regiment served. To him more than to any one man the Regiments—not only the one he commanded, but all four which bore the Company's name—owe both their opportunity and their ability to secure the laurels which they won.

21. THE MARETH LINE

March—April 1943

Built by the French for the defence of Tunisia against any Italian attack from Tripolitania, the Mareth line had consisted of fixed defences—a sort of miniature Maginot line, with concrete pillboxes and light guns mounted in cupolas. The French had removed the guns, but the Germans with their customary thoroughness had strengthened the line with trenches and field works, and converted the Wadi Zigzaou, which ran across the front, into a formidable tank obstacle 250 feet wide and at places 50 feet deep, in front of which, again, deep minefield and wire obstacles had been sited.

From Mareth on the sea the line ran to the disjointed ranges of the Matmata Hills. By sweeping round the first group of hills it was possible to find a corridor running northward towards the coast, but this narrowed, opposite Gabes, to a gap fifteen miles wide, between the sea and the salt marsh of Chott el Fedjadj, which at this season of the year was utterly impassable.

With the capture of Tripoli seven weeks earlier,[1] 8 Army had been merged with the Anglo-American forces in the north to constitute Eighteenth Army Group under General Alexander, with General Eisenhower exercising supreme command over all the Allied forces. Command of the Axis forces, too, had been merged. 5 Panzer Army, under General von Arnim, which had been rushed across from Italy to hold Tunis against First Army's advance, joined Army Group Afrika under Field-Marshal Rommel.

Alexander's purpose was to unite his forces by the dual operation of crushing the Mareth line and outflanking it with a left hook round the hills and through the Gabes Gap. Rommel's purpose was to hold the two forces apart while he fell upon 1 American Armoured Division in their hastily contrived position in front of the Kasserine Pass. That done—and things looked black for some days, until General Alexander's generalship had stopped the German thrust—Rommel staged his last effort to overthrow 8 Army.

It was unlike Rommel to send in his tanks without reconnaissance and without artillery support; but that was how they came.

The British infantry faced them without budging, knocking out 52 tanks with their anti-tank guns. With heavy casualties Rommel drew back into the Mareth line. There General Montgomery attacked him on 21 March 1943.

British Intelligence reports had again been at fault. They had spoken of Italian troops manning the enemy line; but when, after the usual terrific barrage, infantry of 50 Division went in they found crack German troops opposing them in a position almost impregnable to frontal attack. As soon as it was seen that the infantry were held, and indeed strongly counter-attacked, General Montgomery determined on his left hook, using 1 Armoured Division and the New Zealanders.

The Regiment, in action among the orange groves of Medinine, were suddenly but unobtrusively withdrawn on 23 March and sped south with the Division, armour on transporters, to Foume Tatahouine, on the first stage of a two-day, 120-mile circuit across the Desert and into the corridor among the Matmata Hills. Not a single German aircraft attended them.

It was known that Rommel had a switch line across his right flank. It was no longer, actually, "Rommel". Ten days earlier the German commander, a sick man, his throat bandaged, his face covered with desert sores, had flown back to Germany. For hospital treatment? It was unlike him. Had he, in despair at the Führer's frantic orders for a last-man stand in Tunis, lost his grip? Or had he gone back to demand permission to "do a Dunkirk" with his Panzer divisions, whose men, unlike their tanks, could never be replaced?

Whatever the reason for his departure—and half a dozen reasons have been advanced—the men who had fought against him in the Desert would have scouted one explanation advanced, surprisingly, by General Eisenhower, a man who did not know Rommel: that he had left to save his skin. 8 Army knew him too well.

However, they did not know, when the left hook was in process of delivery, that he had gone; and even when they did know, they still spoke of the enemy as "Rommel": for the personality of this honoured foe had dominated the German effort for so long.

It was known, then, that "Rommel" had a switch line across his flank; but it was believed that the men in that line were unaware of the blow about to descend on them. That, in fact, was untrue. They knew they were about to be attacked; but with what overwhelming intensity they did not guess. For this attack was to be a typical Montgomery blow: another Alamein; with the same careful planning, the white-taped lines for the minefield passages, the same terrific barrage; but it was to be accompanied by an air bombardment heavier, even, than that of Alamein—the most shattering the war had seen.

Fifteen squadrons of fighter bombers, five squadrons of Spitfires and two squadrons of Hurricane "tank-busters" would take part, as the New Zealanders, supported by 8 Armoured Brigade, attacked. At the appointed time, whether the infantry had reached their objectives or not, 1 Armoured Division were to pass through and smash their way to El Hamma, in the first planned night-firing operation British armour had been given to do.

The whole plan was a brilliant success. At 1530 hours on 26 March 1943 the New Zealanders attacked. Through the breach they made 2 Armoured Brigade charged, the Batteries following close behind their own Regiments.

Two miles into the enemy lines the Batteries had pierced, liquidating a few anti-tank guns on the way, when they were halted. Tank crews dismounted and chatted in groups. "All the trouble in my life", commented one cavalryman, pointing to the moon whose rise was the signal for the next advance, "has been caused by that leery old man, one way and another."

At 0130 on 27 March the advance began again—a thrust so concentrated that the whole Brigade moved on a 200-yard front astride the El Hamma track. By now the enemy was fully alive to the danger, and had sited a strong screen of anti-tank guns among the palm trees on either side of the Brigade's path. It was not enough to halt their advance. Self-propelled guns, tanks and heavy artillery, including 210-mm., were moved round to hold them up till forces in the Mareth line could be withdrawn.

Regardless of the deadly crossfire the Brigade carried on; silenced and captured enemy guns were left, with burning vehicles, to line their route. Enemy infantry were flushed from hidden wadis. One 88-mm. anti-tank gun held up the advance for 15 minutes before it was eliminated.

After another brief halt the Brigade renewed their attack at dawn. By now they were almost surrounded with swirling enemy armour and infantry, while low-flying aircraft tried desperately to halt their advance. The three Batteries were firing north-west, north-east and south.

Soon after first light a fresh menace appeared, as 20 tanks of 21 Panzer Division thrust in from the Mareth line in rear of the Brigade to cut them off. Against 76 Regiment's anti-tank guns the Panzers broke, to be chased away in a spirited gallop by 10 Hussars with B Battery in support.

Meanwhile on the outskirts of El Hamma A and E Batteries, with their Regiments, had reined back on meeting concentrated shell fire and close range anti-tank guns hidden in the palm groves. Lieut. Laskey (F.O.O. to E Battery) was killed by a 210-mm. shell, and Major Butler-Stoney, while outside his tank putting on a tow-rope, also received a fatal wound.

With the Panzer attack frustrated, 1 Armoured Division's line of communication was secure. High ground on their right was seized during the day by 7 Motor Brigade, so that now the Division looked down on Gabes and the Batteries, concentrated under Regimental command, engaged, with the Divisional Artillery, in a two-day shooting match; by no means a one-sided one. During the night 88-mm. air-bursts made things unpleasant in the Headquarters leaguer; and next day some of the guns were caught in a heavy 210-mm. concentration. Captain Drage and his crew, bogged and disabled in their Titanica on the left of the Bays' leading troop, had to be towed out by a tank under a smoke screen.

But the Gabes gap could not be closed in time. Though 1 Armoured Division roped in 3000 prisoners; though he left behind 11 tanks, 81 guns and vehicles uncountable, the enemy managed adroitly to extricate his main forces. At dawn on 29 March he had gone.

Early that morning the Division advanced in full cry, sweeping out on to the broad plain, only to be held up again for another artillery duel. Stukas took a hand in this too, causing casualties—Gunner F. B. Wilson killed and four wounded—in E Battery. Step by step the guns advanced, firing steadily, till they faced still another barrier across the Wadi Akarit. In a crescent of hills, one flank resting on the sea, the other on the impassable salt marshes of Chott el Fedjadj, which stretch inland for 100 miles, 15 Panzer and 90 Light Divisions again made a stand; "fighting", as Field-Marshal Alexander has put it, "perhaps the best battle of their distinguished careers".

Only a set attack could pierce so strong a line; for every British movement had to be made in full view of the enemy's carefully sited O.P.s and guns. From 1 to 5 April the Regiment remained in action while the cavalry withdrew for maintenance. There was time, however, for some much-needed attention to the Regiment's guns and vehicles; time, also, for the troops to revel in baths in El Hamma's hot sulphur springs.

Then, on 6 April, British infantry and Gurkhas streamed across the plain in open order under a heavy barrage. Scots and Tynesiders with the bayonet, Gurkhas with the *kukri*, cut their way into the foothills. Columns of prisoners 8000 strong came winding through the smoke.

Next day, unopposed, the Brigade, re-formed again into regimental groups, drove through the Tabaga Pass to join up with the Americans at Mezzouna. But the Americans were not at Mezzouna; which was, indeed, being stubbornly held by enemy tanks. Sweeping round the hills, the Bays and 10 Hussars, supported by A and B Batteries, found themselves stopped by heavy armour-piercing fire. They leaguered for one of the most bitterly cold nights of the campaign, to resume their drive at dawn. But the enemy had withdrawn again.

There followed a galloping advance, the Brigade brushing aside small pockets of resistance, till on 11 April, north of Telil, they learned there was not a German left within 20 miles of them.

All pretence of battle ceased that afternoon. Gathering round Regimental Headquarters at Bou Thadi, while the rest of the Brigade concentrated in the Divisional rest area, the Regiment learned that they were to leave 8 Army on loan to First Army, coming under the command of 6 Armoured Division.

NOTE TO CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

[1] Rommel's old victims at St. Valery, 51 (Highland) Division, riding in on the backs of tanks, had swept 90 Light Division out of the town.

22. DESTINATION—TUNIS

April—May 1943

By now First Army and the Americans, after vicissitudes which shall be described in another chapter, had reached a line stretching due south from just west of Bizerta, overlapping the coastal advance of 8 Army through Sfax and beyond. Mountainous country was slowing up 8 Army, and 6 Armoured Division lay just behind Fondouk awaiting their turn to take up the pursuit which was to pin the remnants of the enemy into the Cap Bon peninsula.

Tracks and vehicles dividing, 11 Regiment set out on a 300-mile trek, through Sbeitla and Le Kef, to Aroussa. Here, leaguering for a couple of days in a wood fragrant with pine and myrtle, they found themselves alongside 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A., also under command of 6 Armoured Division. There was a tremendous reunion.

For a few days the Regiments were in action together, in the last concerted battle of the African war. The plan was for V Corps to attack Tunis eastwards from Medjaz el Bab while the Americans thrust southwards from the Bizerta area; the French at Pont du Fahs and 8 Army at Enfidaville keeping the enemy busy meanwhile on their respective fronts.

At zero hour the three Batteries were to support the opening infantry attack. Then, when a gap was made, they were to pass through behind the armoured regiments of 26 Armoured Brigade to which they had been attached; A Battery with 17/21 Lancers, B with 16/5 Lancers and E with the Lothians and Border Horse.

Even before the battle began the Germans shewed that they were resolved, hopeless though their position might seem, to obey Hitler's express order and fight to the last. E Battery, moving into a hull-down position behind a crest on the night 20/21 April, found an enemy parachute battalion installed on the crest itself.

Major Morris and Captain McAllum, walking forward 100 yards in front of the gun position to investigate, were greeted with a fusillade of Spandau bullets. Their white sheepskin coats—they fully shared the sartorial diversity which distinguished 8 Army from its Commander downwards—made an easy mark in the gloom. They hastily discarded them and Major Morris, crawling back to the guns, set about organising a defence, while Captain McAllum stayed put on the ridge.

Both officers won the Military Cross for their work that night. Moving his Priests back about 200 yards and himself covering a wadi to the left rear with his tank, Major Morris opened up on the enemy with .50 Brownings in order not to disclose the presence of artillery. An hour later, as the Germans seemed to be reinforcing, he ordered his guns to fire, and thus prevented their securing a foothold on the crest.

They proved, however, a determined enemy, and by the time the guns were in action in their new position the Germans had set ablaze one of the ammunition dumps on the original gun site. The Battery were under continuous fire, but Major Morris's presence of mind, and the skill with which he used his guns, drove them by dawn not only from the near-by crest but also from a threatening position on a hill 1000 yards further back.

Meanwhile Captain McAllum remained all night on the crest, observing the enemy: sharing, indeed, the same ridge with the German O.P.s. Throughout the next day he remained there, though, the British infantry attack having proved unsuccessful, the Battery now found themselves in the front defence line, target for heavy shell and mortar fire.

Captain McAllum's determination in sticking to his post prevented the enemy from making an outflanking movement or consolidating their position. Only when the enemy had been driven off did he relax his perilous watch.

Fighting in the open under the old conditions, the Battery would have suffered heavily, but they blessed the stout armour-plating of their Priests and carried on without casualties.

When the British attack was renewed next day 26 Armoured Brigade swept across the Goubellat Plain. Mines had been scattered indiscriminately among the cornfields. Lieut. A. S. Humphreys was fatally wounded while leading E Battery guns forward through the mines. His truck was stuck and, dismounting, he was shot by Spandau fire from a house near by.

Several tanks were blown up, including Lieut-Colonel Goodbody's. Two of his crew were killed. He escaped with a leg injury, but nothing would induce him to go to hospital. Instead, he stayed at Divisional Headquarters, coming up from time to time to visit the Regiment, of which Major J. R. Richmond now took command; Major Maclaren becoming Second-in-Command, while Major D. Rowlandson took over B Battery.

Through this and the following day the tank battle grew fierce as the armour approached Jebel Kournine, an 800-foot peak dominating the whole plain.

Here on 24 April the Regiment came across the Mark VI, the Tiger tank, for the first time. Its fame had been widely canvassed. It weighed 60 tons, three times as much as its predecessors, and had front armour (102-mm.) thrice as stout, while maintaining a fair speed—18 miles an hour, as against the Crusader's 28 and the Sherman's 25. It mounted an 88-mm. gun with all-round traverse, and had two machine-guns.

Two of these monsters opposed 17/21 Lancers beneath Kournine; and the Regiment, in their first encounter with them, scored two direct hits, brewing them up most successfully; but it was noted that no shots on the front penetrated their armour.

Several casualties occurred that day. Captain McAllum, having defied enemy gunfire for so long, was wounded, as were Lieut. R. Thomson and Lieut. (Quartermaster) L. A. S. Chatfield.

It was during this action that Captain Drage of A Battery won his Military Cross. A squadron were held by Mark IV tanks and anti-tank guns defiladed in a deep wadi. Observation was only to be had from a crest 1500 yards in front of the squadron—a crest plastered with mortar and machine-gun fire. To this crest Drage wormed his way. Whenever he shewed himself he was greeted by a burst of fire, anti-tank guns joining in. Keeping on the move, he continued coolly to try to direct fire till, after many attempts, his Battery Commander ordered him to withdraw.

Throughout the fight the enemy resisted doggedly, sending in fighter bombers and a "tank-buster" squadron against our armour. Such palls of smoke obscured the battlefield that more than once the Luftwaffe bombed their own troops; the Regiment adding to their confusion by firing smoke whenever the O.P.s reported a sortie approaching.

That day 11 Regiment were ordered to rejoin 1 Armoured Division—which meant carrying on beneath Kournine—as the two Divisions changed places.

The hill itself was almost impregnable—ringed with machine-gun nests and booby traps; honeycombed with passages and reinforced O.P.s commanding a perfect view of the attackers. All round the clock the Batteries, settling down for a static period, and a very trying one, sniped at everything that shewed itself and diversified matters with half-hourly salvos of air-burst.

This harassing spell—marked by the loss of Captain J. A. McGwire and Lieut. G. E. Lloyd, both wounded—came to an end on 3 May, when, ordered back for a short rest, the Regiment left Kournine, as one Battery Commander put it, "with universal pleasure and unparalleled speed". About this time Major Maclaren left the Regiment for a staff appointment.

By nightfall on 5 May the Batteries were in the fight again, back with 26 Armoured Brigade for the final assault on Tunis. At dawn the infantry had secured their objectives and the Brigade, threading the white-taped lanes through the minefield, fanned out towards Bordj el Frendj.

There was a fierce moment when enemy tanks, wheeling away from the Brigade spearhead, darted in on the right. B Battery's O.P. tank was twice hit by a Tiger, and stopped. Captain Bolton ordered his crew out and baled out himself, but as soon as he found his men were not all with him, Bolton turned back to rescue them. The driver and signaller were still in the tank, both wounded. As Bolton pulled him out the driver was again wounded, this time mortally; but Bolton got the signaller out and carried him to safety; nor would he relax, though himself suffering from severe shock, until, through withering fire, he had found a doctor, taken him to the two men and ensured that every possible thing had been done for them. His devotion earned him the Military Cross.

It was in this action, too, that Gunner E. W. Robinson (A Battery) won the Military Medal. He was in charge of an ambulance when a Guardsman asked him to go forward to a knocked out Bren carrier in front of the line, which had some wounded men in it. Without hesitation he took his ambulance forward, with a driver and a medical orderly, crawling with stretchers to the wounded men. Under intense machine-gun fire he saw to the dressing of their wounds and brought the whole party to safety. "His coolness and devotion to duty", said the citation, "not only saved the men's lives, but were an example to all."

The attack was never allowed to lose momentum. It was the cavalry-R.H.A. partnership at its best. In blinding dust the Lothians swept forward through the gap the infantry had made.

"The defences with which we had to contend", says their historian, "were mainly the dreaded 88-mm., some of which were knocked out by the artillery supporting us. The speed and accuracy of the guns of 11 R.H.A. was quite incredible and undoubtedly saved us many casualties. Those guns that remained were quickly eliminated."

As E Battery methodically pushed forward, picking off enemy anti-tank guns, 100 enemy sprang out of the ground; not to attack but to surrender. They were A.A. gunners, part of the many rushed overseas at the last minute to try to save Afrika Korps. Half their battery had been drowned on the way over, and most of their equipment lost; and anyhow they were A.A. gunners, they said, and had not the slightest idea how to fight tanks.

Throughout the next day, 7 May, the battle raged between Massicault and Mornaghia; 88-mm. anti-tank guns, not dug in but ranged by the dozen in the open, proved no effective obstacle to the onrushing armour. Firing air-burst, the Batteries blasted a way through them and their supporting infantry. A Battery in the centre accounted for six of them; B and E equally busy on either side—and with little loss. One man was killed by a mine; but two unaccountable mishaps—prematures in A and B Batteries—cost one man killed and two wounded.

That afternoon two converging thrusts caught Tunis by surprise. German soldiers were walking the streets with their girls, German officers strolling nonchalantly about, when into the city burst armoured cars: the Derbyshire Yeomanry on one side; 11 Hussars from 7 Armoured Division on the other. Scenes followed which can seldom have been seen in war: civilians clambering on the cars, pelting them with flowers, while a few bolder Germans fired on them with Tommy guns and threw hand grenades; but by morning a force of 5 Royal Tanks had put an end to street fighting and rounded up prisoners by the thousand.

General Alexander, on receipt of the news, swung 6 Armoured Division round for a new task—to force their way into the Bon peninsula through St. Germaine and Hammam Lif, small coastal towns on the narrow plain where the mountains at the base of the peninsula come down to the sea. The Regiment, in fine fettle, leaguered for the night with the cavalry; not failing to remark a distillery close by, where a very drunk German officer was found in charge of thousands of gallons of wine.

Next day the scenes of Tunis were re-enacted and intensified. In front of St. Germaine the Germans had sited a strong position for their last stand, with huge mortars (*nebelwerfers*) and anti-tank guns. Not without casualties, the tanks nosed their way into the town with O.P.s in attendance and the Batteries giving continual support. While the guns were still firing, townspeople clambered on the tanks, showering them with flowers. At a street corner an old lady, almost weeping with delight, stood pouring out tea for anyone who had time to stop, till her meagre store of milk and sugar ran out.

A panic message over the wireless net added to the Regiment's preoccupations. The Bey of Tunis had escaped in a blue car, and must be stopped. Several miscellaneous gentry *were* stopped by the Batteries, including a westernised gentleman in a blue suit, riding in a one-horse cab (who turned out to be secretary to some local potentate) and the Bey's private laundryman.

Stiffer than the St. Germaine barrier was the one a couple of miles short of Hammam Lif. It was breached on 9 May, after the Guards had established themselves on the hill above the town; but the cost was heavy. Five knocked-out British tanks stood in a row in one street. Only the last, one of the Batteries' O.P.s, got through undamaged. Captain Robin Smith of B Battery, who worked forward on to Guards Hill, picked off four 88-mm. guns on the slope bordering the road; but more than 30 were located, and it was two hours before the tanks had worked their way through the town. While two squadrons of the Lothians battered through street by street, their B Squadron executed a manœuvre long remembered in the Regiment's annals. They charged along the beach, firing as they went, and, swerving inland, caught the defenders in rear.

Captain Thomson-Glover directed the fire of E Battery, partly by observation, partly by reports from the tank commanders, bursting his shells just in front of the leading tank.

In all it cost the Brigade nine tanks to take the town; but, in the words of Thomson-Glover, they had bagged "jointly with us, as they kindly put it", nine 88s, five 50-mm.s, a battery of Bredas and about 80 vehicles.

The local population cheered madly. The Bey's bodyguard turned out in fine fancy dress uniform to provide a ceremonial guard of honour, while in all this confusion our infantry, with rifles at the high port, set out to clear the town of all remaining enemy snipers. There were still a few about after the Brigade had passed through the town: some of them engaging B Battery from villas along the beach. The gunners spattered the houses with their Brownings, while others, dismounted, cleared the buildings of the enemy. Proof of this private battle was given to a sceptical R.H.Q. in a broadcast of battle noises over the rear link from the C.P.O. truck, and a German prisoner was held ready to add his voice, if the chatter of the guns could not finally convince the unbelievers.

Having cleared Hammam Lif the batteries split up for a couple of days, supporting their respective regiments in independent columns, to cut across the rear of the enemy still opposing 1 Armoured Division along the peninsula's eastern coast.

Resistance stiffened as they advanced south, where 90 Light Division, the cream of the German army, were fighting it to a finish. An 88-mm. gun, cunningly dug in beside a farmyard manure heap, held up A squadron of the Lothians. "Over the wireless network," says their history, "the Squadron Leader could be heard calling for artillery support from 11 R.H.A. in engaging this awkward target. Within the space of two minutes' time an artillery concentration, with pin-point accuracy, had enveloped the farmhouse, manure heap and anti-tank gun in smoke and flame. The tank 75s added their share of H.E. This was a fair sample of artillery-tank co-operation, of which the Division prided itself on being the principal exponent in the world. During the remainder of the day these S.P.s of the Divisional Artillery rendered us invaluable support. Target after target was eliminated by their concentrations, directed by our advanced tanks."[1]

On 11 May, while 17/21 Lancers, with A Battery, roared through, at 35 miles an hour, to Hammamet, passing prisoners by the thousand, abandoned guns and vehicles by the score, 16/5 Lancers, with B, made for Bou Ficha.

They arrived plumb at the right moment. Just short of the village they came upon Tactical H.Q. of 1 Armoured Division in a hedgerow. General Briggs, commanding the Division, said it was one of the happiest moments of his life when the Priests galloped out of the dust and the gunners waved him a hilarious greeting. There was quite a hold-up at the outskirts of the village. A bridge was blown under the Commanding Officer's wheels as he and Lieut. D. R. Baker drove up in an armoured O.P. car, and anti-tank guns opened fire.

During the night the guns cleared a way through the village, till only six miles separated First Army, thrusting southwards, from 8 Army thrusting north. News was received on 12 May that the Germans had offered surrender if they could be accorded the honours of war. The answer came that surrender would be accepted only under white flags. "Bombers", the message ended, "are now on their way."

At 1500 hours R.H.Q. ordered the Batteries, having marked the northward fringe of the enemy position with smoke, to stop firing. 8 Army gunners had similarly marked the south. Ten minutes later the silence was broken by the throb of 18 aircraft in arrowhead formation. Thrice bomber waves deluged the position with bombs; then tanks, rushing out of the olive groves, tore through the positions. White flags fluttered everywhere.

90 Light Division, the original desert enemies, who had fought magnificently throughout the campaign, kept up their morale to the end. They had stood to the very last round when their gallant commander, Graf von Spoenik, surrendered. Having destroyed all their equipment, they marched singing through the night in orderly columns of threes, officers at their head, towards the prisoner of war camps. There had been some confusion when their commanders refused to surrender except to 8 Army officers. But the Regiment still wore the Rhino sign, and the Germans were content.

Down the road, as 16/5 Lancers charged forward, drove Captain Robin Smith, first man to complete the union of First and 8 Armies. 8 Army O.P. Officers whom he met were astonished to find that the leading "First Army" men they encountered wore their own Rhino sign. At 1650 hours there was a gathering of seven O.P. officers on a blown bridge north of Enfidaville—three of them, Major Rowlandson, Captain Smith and Captain Bolton, from B Battery. A Signals officer, driving back to his unit with a load of beer, opportunely arrived. A toast was drunk.

Now along the road came Lieut.-Colonel J. A. T. Barstow, commanding 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment. The war in North Africa was over.

NOTE TO CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

[1] *Driver Advance*, a short account of the 2 Lothians and Border Horse, 1939-46.

23. BOATING

May—July 1943

For several days the Regiment stayed beside the sea, bathing, celebrating, testing the German and Italian cars which everyone seemed to have acquired. There was a victory parade through Tunis, Major Richmond, Captain Dudley-Smith and Captain Bolton marching, with 30 other ranks, on the right of 6 Armoured Division.

On that auspicious day Lieut.-Colonel Goodbody returned to the Regiment and was able to attend a joint dinner at Nabeul where 80 officers and 150 sergeants of 11 and 12 (H.A.C.) Regiments welcomed the C.R.A.s of 1 and 6 Armoured Divisions as their guests. An airgraph to the Secretary H.A.C., signed by all present, reposes in the archives at Armoury House. Unfortunately, many of the signatures are illegible.

The desert war was over; but not the war. The morning after their victory celebration, 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment were ordered to join 51 (Highland) Division at Djedjelli, a coastal village about halfway between Bizerta and Algiers.

It was soon clear that the Regiment were destined to take part in a seaborne operation. Where that operation would lead them nobody knew until the troops were actually embarked. One thing, however, was certain: they had only a month to perfect themselves in their new role; and a hectic month it was.

Priests and O.P. tanks, battered and war-worn by now beyond the scope of the unit artificers' indefatigable patchings, were ordered into R.E.M.E. workshops at Le Kroub, where Lieut.-Colonel F. Hodges, to whom the Regiment owed a notable debt, had his men working night and day modernising and refitting them. He, on his part, declared that he had never had to deal with such an intelligent or able set of men as those whom the Regiment sent to share in the work.

The help the Regiment received from R.E.M.E. was in striking contrast with the apathy they encountered in other quarters. Their comments on "Groppi's Horse" and the "Short Range

Desert Group" of Cairo days were mild and almost commendatory compared with the despairing and exasperated terms in which the Regimental war diary of the early summer of 1943 records their dealings with the Staff at Algiers and elsewhere, in their endeavours to re-equip in time for the operations to which they were pledged: "No one will help at all . . . The Staff do not seem to begin to understand . . . Their disinterestedness is an absolute scandal . . . The appalling muddle gets worse and worse . . . The C.O. and Second-in-Command have now journeyed over most of North Africa to try to get the wheels turning".

"Terrified to act without American permission, the English Staff found this", the diary comments, "a valuable excuse for doing nothing."

Meanwhile, with what equipment could be scraped together, the Regiment set about learning combined operations: especially the intricate drill of loading Priests into Landing Craft, Tanks, and the still more delicate task of unloading them ready to go instantly into action.

One episode of their practice cruises will long be remembered. A L.C.T. in which A Battery and part of R.H.Q. had embarked on 15 June, running aground on a sandbank on a particularly lonely stretch of coast, slewed round beam on to the breakers and threatened to capsize. Vehicles were shifted; nothing would budge her. Waves breaking over her side filled the ship faster than the pumps could bale.

The Colonel ordered all troops to be got ashore with rations, water and bedding. A "boatswain's chair" was improvised; but it worked sluggishly, and few who entrusted themselves to its slow mercies escaped a ducking. Most of the party swam ashore—though a fierce current gave them a bit of trouble—and rigged a chain to pass the clothes and rations.

While the early arrivals lit fires for brew up and the drying of clothes, other stalwarts, some of them working in the water for four hours at a stretch, ferried equipment across, mending the breeches buoy twice when it broke down. By dusk all were ashore—their clothes-drying efforts frustrated by a deluge of rain.

At first light the salvaging of equipment was resumed, till the beach took on the likeness of a Robinson Crusoe film scene. An American fighter circled overhead, returning later with a message from the Second-in-Command that it was impossible to reach the shipwrecked party by land, and there was nothing for it but to walk.

The C.O., on account of his recent wound, could not march. He and the Acting Adjutant were left behind with a guard. The rest, pressing a stray Arab into service as a guide, marched in single file, carrying just haversacks and water bottles, up 1000-foot hills and down valleys, towards the nearest road.

There was a welcome halt at a French farm, where a charming household gave them fruit and sold them wine and lemonade, and at last they were able to link up by telephone and give their map reference. They had hardly resumed their march when the Second-in-Command appeared with a fleet of small cars, and their rescue was completed.

With a rush, equipment poured upon the Regiment during the last days of June. By 4 July the last of the Priests was loaded on L.C.T.s at Sfax and by 9 July the entire Regiment—less Lieut. H. N. Wane, left behind with 25 vehicles—had sailed from the same port.

24. FIRST GUNS IN EUROPE

July—September 1943

Rough seas took their toll in the early stages of the voyage, but no other enemy appeared. Instead, hundreds of our own four-engined bombers overtook them on their way to soften the defences, dipping in salute as they passed. Then, through the night of 9/10 July, the sea calmed.

"Looking ahead through the darkness", wrote Captain Mark Wathen in a letter home, "I could see far-off tracer shells going up. Ack-ack. That was Europe. As we drew nearer, slowly and silently, we could pick out land, looking just a little more inky-black than the sea . . . We landed on European soil amid a terrific display of tracer shell and bullets—an absolute carnival night!—and with a background of battleships blazing away for all they were worth over our heads.

"I felt myself touching down as the first streaks of dawn came into the eastern sky . . . The whole thing went like clockwork, and we reaped a rich reward for all the strenuous weeks that had gone before."

The Regiment's guns were the first artillery to land in the invasion of Europe.

They went ashore at Pachino, on Sicily's southern tip. So devastating had been the effect of the preliminary bombardment—rocket-firing ships, naval guns and aircraft combining to batter the defences—that the Regiment's landing was virtually unopposed. Guns and vehicles reached the shore with no mishaps worse than the loss of one Priest's water-proofing; and despite this the piece, though completely submerged, was safely landed.

Instead of digging in under shell fire, as all ranks had expected, the Regiment, sited among sun-drenched vineyards, found nothing to do in their first hours ashore but to fire two ranging rounds. At dusk, however, E Battery set forth along the Syracuse road as part of an armoured column despatched to keep touch with the retiring enemy. By morning the whole Regiment, as part of Harpoon Force, were moving northwards.

Resistance was first encountered on the morning of 12 July just short of Palazzolo, where after two hours' fighting the Regiment silenced the enemy's guns and mortars and the column captured the village with 400 prisoners, a tank and 11 guns. Lance-Sergeant D. Tomlin, driver of E Battery's Observation Post tank, shewed once more the initiative which had already marked him out during the battles of Agheila, Knightsbridge, Alamein, El Hamma and Tunis. Heaps of rubble blocked his path into the village. Dismounting, he piloted a way through, regardless of risk from snipers.

By afternoon on 12 July Buccheri had been taken, but at dusk, near Vizzini, the Hermann Goering Reconnaissance Unit put up a stout resistance. The armour had run far ahead of its supporting Highland infantry. Taking advantage of this, German tanks cut into Buccheri that night, severing the column's supply route. They were driven out at daybreak on 13 July.

That day the Regiment sustained their first casualties in Sicily. Three men were burned in an accident to a Priest, and later, during the fierce battle of assault and counter-attack at Vizzini, Major Rowlandson, commanding B Battery, was killed when an air-burst shell exploded near his tank as he was observing. Major Charles took command of the Battery.

The stubborn defence of the little town ceased on 14 July when, after a day of hard but inconclusive fighting, the Regiment supported a midnight attack by 154 Brigade; but on reaching the town they found the Germans had retired—leaving, however, many Italians who were made prisoners, besides a number of guns and vehicles. Both sides were using paratroops: several Germans, dropped in battery areas, were captured before they could do any harm.

From Vizzini the Batteries pushed northwards, A Battery through Militello, B and E through Francofonte to the outskirts of Scordia. Here once again Lance-Sergeant Tomlin distinguished himself. The armour found itself held up below a high and difficult ridge. Tomlin managed to manœuvre his tank to the crest of the ridge. Here, alone, the O.P. was able to do valuable service in directing fire on enemy transport. It was an hour before any other tank succeeded in reaching the spot. This latest feat, coupled with his previous displays of enterprise, won Lance-Sergeant Tomlin the Military Medal.

That evening (15 July) the two columns, after some desultory fighting, rejoined north of Scordia, halting, on high ground overlooking the Catania plain, to allow the infantry to catch up.

During the night the Batteries were twice raided by German fighter aircraft (ME 109s). Captain McAllum and two of his crew, Gunners A. A. Philip and F. Wookey, were fatally burned when their Honey tank was hit and set on fire by air cannon. McAllum's death was a great loss to B Battery (which he had joined in 1937) and to the Regiment, with which he had served since the outbreak of war, winning the Military Cross after many exhibitions of gallantry.

Across the plain and into the foothills of Mount Etna the enemy fell back, contesting every step courageously. Their dogged efforts to keep the British out contrasted with the rapturous greeting with which, in turn, the civilian inhabitants of each village welcomed them in.

For a fortnight the Regiment faced Mount Etna, watching its steam cloud, stretched across the horizon, change at sunrise and sunset to pink and gold. Between them and the volcano, the enemy's Catania line ran westwards from the famous old seaport, along the river Dittaino, northernmost of the three streams that converge just short of the harbour.

A lucky capture had given the British generals a detailed layout of all the enemy's fortified posts as far north as Messina (a genuine layout this; not like the bogus one which General Montgomery had caused to be "captured" before Alamein); but knowing these positions and taking them by assault were different matters. The defences around the port itself were particularly strong—lines of trenches interlaced with barbed wire, covered by minefields and dotted with pillboxes.

Each of the British divisions in turn "had a go" at the line. The Regiment, being now Army Troops, were on call to support any such attack, made generally by infantry, since armour was severely handicapped in this country of narrow rock-walled roads.

From a central maintenance and rest camp at Ramacca the Batteries sallied forth to one sector after another; returning when the job was done to their haven among the orchards where oranges, almonds and grapes for the asking alleviated the intolerable heat, by day and night, of the *sirocco*; and water from deep cool wells formed a pleasant contrast to that carried in the vehicle cans, which by midday had become too hot to drink.

When the infantry of the Highland Division took the Gerbini airfield the Regiment were in support. There was much booty on that occasion, for the field was littered with smashed equipment.

Reconnoitring in preparation for the next attack—that of the Canadians on Catenanuova—both R.H.Q. and E Battery sustained casualties, for the winding mountain road over which they had to move was accurately registered by the enemy. Lance-Bombardier R. Harper of E Battery was killed and Gunner R. Stanford badly wounded, dying later in hospital.

A fine piece of rescue work was performed here by Lance-Corporal J. McA. Morans, which gained him the Military Medal. Disregarding his own safety he went back to Harper's vehicle, tending the wounded under fire, bringing two of them back to his own truck and finally, still running the gauntlet of the shelling, conveying them to the Dressing Station.

Priests were moved in the dark to such covered positions as could be found, and from the top of Mount Scalpello E Battery's O.P. registered the first air-burst barrage used in the war—65 rounds per gun. Superimposed on the high explosive barrage furnished by the field and medium batteries, it helped the Canadians to achieve a complete success; and still supported by the Regiment they were able to press on towards the stronghold of Centuripe.

Finally, in a superb attack, 78 Division scaled the heights of the mountain fortress on 3 August. A leading part in the assault was played by 5 Buffs under the command of a pre-war officer of the Battalion, Lieut.-Colonel A. D. McKechnie.

By now the Priests had become, once more, war-worn beyond the powers of the battery fitters to maintain them. B and E Batteries and R.H.Q. were, therefore, withdrawn from the line. A Battery carried on, supporting in turn the Canadians and 78 Division; and theirs were the only guns available to put down a barrage for the attack on Aderno. That post taken, the advance continued on 9 August to Bronte.

Here again the British assault met with heavy and accurate shell fire. One spot on the road up to the Battery position was congested with stationary guns and vehicles. Realising that there were likely to be casualties, Captain Martin, the Regiment's Medical Officer, made his way to the spot just as it was being heavily shelled. Several men were hit. Disregarding his own safety Captain Martin dressed their wounds. Not only did he undoubtedly save several lives. He also spread around him a steadying atmosphere. His cool courage, displayed on this and many other occasions, won him the Military Cross.

On the slopes of Etna the Priests faced a new test, grinding their way through walls and over lava terraces into positions resembling North Country slag-heaps. Still pressing northwards, A Battery supported 78 Division's attack on Maletto on 12 August; then returned to join the rest of the Regiment in a pleasant sea-bathing resort near Catania. Major Chrimes, having been appointed Brigade Major R.A. to XXX Corps, handed over command of A Battery to Major Dudley-Smith; and on Captain Wathen's evacuation to hospital Captain Drage took over as Adjutant.

Their own equipment being in the workshops, the Regiment, unwilling to be entirely left out of the invasion of Italy across the Messina Straits, determined to see what they could do with captured enemy guns. Night and day E Battery, led by Major Morris, worked on two 12-inch howitzers made—in Italy, on British designs—during the first World War.

This attempt ended in disappointment. They had calibrated these enormous pieces and with infinite labour loaded each gun on to three tank transporters, but were destined not to get them to Messina, for they were no sooner on the road than they were ordered off, for blocking the traffic.

Undaunted, Major Morris went on to Messina where, with the help of Italian gunfitters in an Italian workshop, he put together an Italian 149-mm. (6-in.) gun. This was calibrated and brought into action among American guns lined up for the barrage across the Straits—not without difficulty: the diesel tractor having crashed on a slope, the gun was winched by two quads into position in the front garden of a house. Thence, on the morning of 3 September, E Battery fired 76 rounds in three and a half hours at various concentration areas on the Italian mainland.

Resistance within range soon ceased with the Italian collapse, and the Battery were relieved; handing back their gun to the Italian workshops and punctiliously obtaining a signature for same.

25. RETURN TICKET

September 1943—*May* 1944

For two weeks the Regiment luxuriated in their sea-side health resort. Practically all their equipment was handed in; the little they were to retain being crated for North Africa. Under the auspices of 4 Armoured Brigade they took part in a farewell review, parading on the right of the line as became a R.H.A. Regiment. Four complete regiments of Sherman tanks took part.

There were two Regimental dinners on almost peace-time scale. At one the C.O. was the guest of honour; at the other, Brigadier John Currie, Brigadier Fellowes and Lieut.-Colonel Tom Smith, a former C.O. of B Battery, now commanding a Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Borrowed transport conveyed them down to Syracuse, and the Regiment embarked in H.M. Transport *Marigot*, a small French cargo-passenger boat. Anchored off Valetta for two days, they sent their greetings to Viscount Gort, V.C., Governor General of Malta, who had recently been appointed Colonel Commandant of the H.A.C. He signalled back his acknowledgment, but was unable to visit the Regiment afloat, nor was anyone allowed to go ashore. The Regiment witnessed, however, the memorable sight of the surrendered Italian Navy manœuvring into position.

When the *Marigot* came alongside at Bizerta on 25 September 1943, there were queries from the dockside: "Just out from Blighty?" A curt reply came from the gunners hanging over the rails—the Arabic *aiwa*. The Staff work which had so impressed the Regiment before they left North Africa was well in evidence on their return. 1 Armoured Division had not been notified of their arrival and were not expecting them, and the first people to greet them as they disembarked were their own rear party whom they had left behind in Sicily.

The Regiment camped among old friends near Bizerta, where 2 and 4 Regiments R.H.A. produced a magnificent welcome. It was a timely arrival, for everyone was able to join in farewells to

Brigadier "Friz" Fowler, on completion of his long and forceful tour as C.R.A. 1 Armoured Division. A fortnight later, the Regiment were delighted to find themselves back with 1 Armoured Division again, camped among comfortable French farms inland from Algiers, everyone with a pleasant roof over his head as the winter rains set in. No Priests were to be had, so the Regiment busied themselves on individual training and sand-table schemes.

There was a joyful moment when a wanderer returned—Sergeant Dornton-Duff, M.M., the Regiment's most determined escaper. He had been captured south of Mersa Matruh on 29 June 1942. Almost immediately he escaped from the column of prisoners; was recaptured after three days. On 12 July he escaped from Campo 70, cutting his way through the wire with another N.C.O. while the guard were at dinner. They headed for Switzerland. After walking 120 miles in 10 days they were recaptured and taken back to camp where they were beaten up.

After the armistice with Italy, prisoners of war were not allowed to leave Campo 70, but the senior British officer gave permission for Dornton-Duff and three other N.C.O.s to watch the main road for the Germans' approach. After reporting to the camp by telephone they disobeyed orders to return and made south independently. Dornton-Duff reached British lines at Lucera on 1 October 1943.

It was reported that Dornton-Duff had displayed outstanding morale in the prison camp and had made many attempts to escape by digging tunnels and other means. He was now awarded a second decoration, the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Early in December eight Priests were released, with sufficient equipment for a battery, and B Battery began a firing camp in the hills near Bir Rabalou; but when it came to their turn the other Batteries were washed out by winter deluges.

Christmas 1943 was celebrated on a scale which must have raised the eyebrows of the people at home, when they read of turkeys, poultry, pork galore—despite American competition; unlimited wine, and champagne on sale in the Battery canteens; of the Regimental Dance on 8 January 1944—a huge success, with Lieut.-Colonel Barstow and four other officers of 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment among the guests and a bevy of matrons, nurses and French girls for partners; of sports galore, in which A Battery won for the second time the Tmimi Soccer Cup.

As equipment began to pour in, real training began again at Bouira, among the Atlas mountains, in a camp 18 inches deep in mud.

At the end of February the Regiment said a regretful *au revoir* to Lieut.-Colonel Goodbody, on his promotion to command 2 Armoured Brigade. He sailed shortly afterwards to reconnoitre the Anzio beachhead. He had been awarded the D.S.O. for his services in the Sicilian campaign.

"Lieut.-Colonel Goodbody's Regiment", the citation related, "was constantly in action covering a very wide front. He never spared himself and was constantly well forward under heavy shell fire, selecting new battery areas. His support and advice were a tremendous help. As a result, the Brigade was never without artillery support when required. At Vizzini on 13 July, and again on the River Dittaino on 19 July, Lieut.-Colonel Goodbody shewed great gallantry and leadership in reconnoitring suitable gun areas and observation posts."

In a letter to the Colonel Commandant Brigadier Goodbody wrote: "The 15 months during which it has been my honour to command 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. have been the most enjoyable and inspiring months of my life. No gunner officer can have had a more courageous, loyal and willing regiment of officers and men to command than I have had, and my respect and admiration for them is quite beyond my power to express.

"I do not yet know the name of my successor, but he will be a very lucky and most honoured man and I know will get on all occasions the magnificent support which I have always been given. Their spirit and pride in their tradition will, I know, never decrease, and whatever tasks they may yet be called upon to carry out will be done with the same determination and accurate thoroughness as they have always been done in the past.

"Lastly I should like to say that the support which you and the Court of Assistants have given me during my period of command and the interest which you take in the Regiment have been the greatest assistance to me. I hope that I may be privileged to be at Armoury House when they next march through the gates, and if I cannot march at their head I can at least add my cheer to yours."

Lieut-Colonel J. H. Slade-Powell took over command of the Regiment on 3 April, and 16 days later was able to call for Regimental Fire for the Colonel Commandant, Lord Gort, on his first visit to a unit of the Company. It was a very brief visit, and came at a moment when B Battery were away at practice camp; but the rest of the Regiment paraded in hollow square and Lord Gort found time to speak individually to every officer and man. He was keen to discover how many of them had fought with the Regiment through the Desert, and exchanged grim smiles with those who told him that Knightsbridge had been quite the most unpleasant battle they had known. A few days later he sent the C.O. the following signal:

"It afforded me very real pleasure to see the Regiment on parade. I was greatly impressed by the soldierly appearance of all ranks, and much touched by the occasion, which was my first opportunity to visit any unit of the H.A.C."

By the beginning of May a hundred and one rumours as to the Regiment's future had resolved themselves. Advance parties had already left for Italy, and news had been received that a 3-tonner of A Battery had crashed on a hillside near Potenza, Lance-Bombardier V. Clegg and Gunner S. J. Macallan being killed outright and three others seriously injured.

On 24 May the Regiment, as part of 1 Armoured Division Royal Artillery Group, embarked in H.M. Transport *Ville d'Oran* for Italy.

26. ITALIAN BACKGROUND

August 1943—*May* 1944

A good deal of history had been made in the nine months since the Regiment, their Priests and guns worn almost to scrap, had been withdrawn from the line in Sicily. On 17 August 1943, the day after Messina fell, plans for a double invasion of Italy were finally "buttoned up".

The stronger blow (Avalanche was its code name) was to be the landing of a new American Army, the Fifth, plus the British X Corps, at Salerno, just south of Naples. The swifter blow (its code name Baytown) was to be delivered by 8 Army. What the opposition would be in either case was difficult to foresee. The Italians, free of the incubus of Mussolini, were eager, not only to surrender, but to come in on the Allied side against their hated Axis partners. Though their actual negotiations to this end, conducted by cloak-and-dagger subterfuges in Lisbon and elsewhere, may have been unsuspected, the spirit actuating them was well enough known to the Germans.

It remained to be seen how much of Italy Hitler's much-reinforced armies would attempt to hold. Where would they make the desperate stand which must be made, to deny to the Allies the airfields of Northern Italy, from which British and American bombers could easily reach many of Germany's most vital industrial targets?

As it turned out, the two divisions which General Montgomery slipped across the Messina Straits on the night of 3 September—with the unconventional aid, already recorded, of E Battery's "borrowed" gun—met little resistance. By 16 September the entire toe of Italy had been overrun. Within a week Admiral Cunningham's Battle Fleet had put V Corps and 1 Airborne Division ashore at Taranto, and 78 Division with 4 Armoured Brigade, landing at Bari on the Adriatic coast, had secured the heel.

The Salerno landing was far more toughly opposed. The Germans had little doubt where the landing would be made, for from Italy's toe northwards this was the first practicable beach. They had replaced all Italian troops in the defences, and their broadcasts, throughout the assault, were successions of boasts that the Allies would, within a few days, be swept into the sea.

On the night of 8 September the landing began—a few hours after Marshal Badoglio, much dreading what the Germans would say and do, had announced Italy's surrender over the wireless. There was a week of furious fighting before General Mark Clark could report that the bridgehead was secure, and could link with 8 Army's northward advance.

Three major military projects in Europe were now sharing the attention of British and American statesmen and strategists. Foremost among them ranked Overlord, the cross-Channel assault, due some time next year, which was to strike to the heart of Germany. Supplementary to this there could be a landing in the south of France—Anvil was its code name—followed by a swift penetration northwards to divert some of the enemy's forces from opposing the main effort and eventually to link with it. Finally, there was the Italian campaign already under way.

At no level and at no time was there doubt as to Overlord's predominance. Stalin insisted on it, miscalling it "the Second Front", for he had persistently disparaged the Allied efforts on either shore of the Mediterranean and made light of the extent to which they had diverted Hitler's forces from the Russian front.[1]

His pressure on the British Prime Minister and the American President was reinforced by gangs of dubious parentage who scribbled by night, on London's bomb-shattered walls, demands for the "Second Front" in which, as in daytime they pleaded, they had "conscientious" objections to taking part.

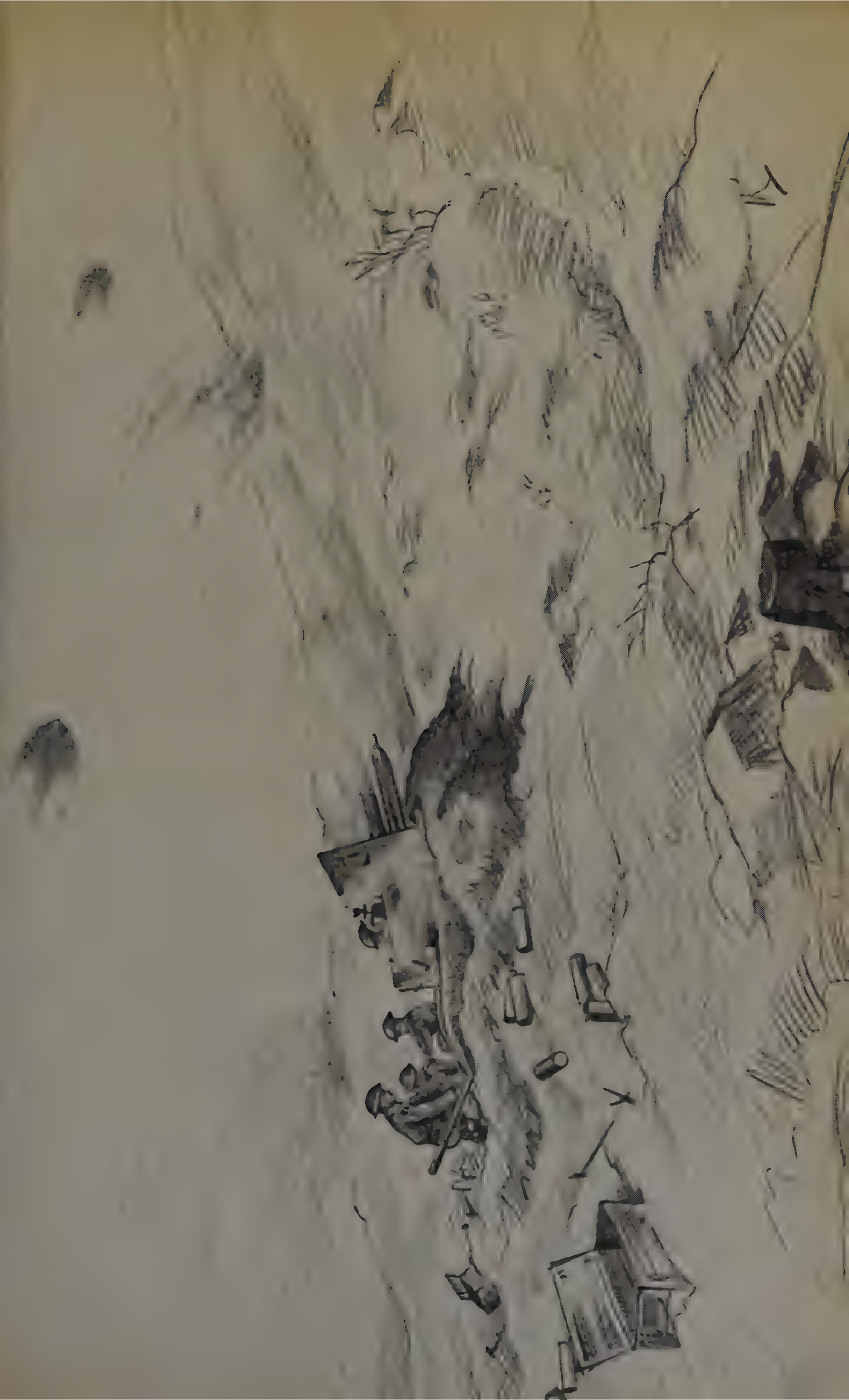
How far the present Italian and the future Riviera campaigns would help or hinder Overlord; how far they would dissipate the German forces; how far they would divert Allied men and material from the main task, were questions to which the top statesmen and strategists gave frequent but fluctuating answers.

Faced with a certain degree of "backing and filling"

BELOW

12 Regiment in their first big action, near Bou Arada, January 1943. From their base on Grandstand Hill the Irish Brigade attacked the dominant Two Tree Hill, but unsuccessfully, and Grandstand itself was counter-attacked. At one point the forward guns were unable to fire because of the shortness of range, and were turned in their pits to engage tanks on the plain behind while the rear troop engaged, at 600 yards, the infantry in front. The counter-attack was beaten off.

(Drawn by Capt. V. C. Robertson)



in high quarters, General Montgomery had ordered that until 1 October no main advance should be made, nor anything more than aggressive patrolling attempted, beyond the Bari-Altamura line.

Lieut.-General Allfrey, commanding V Corps, did not exactly put the telescope to his blind eye; but the organ to which he applied it, in scanning the signal, was at all events myopic. His "patrols" were so aggressive that by 1 October he had crossed the river Ofanto, seized the much-coveted airfield of Foggia and occupied the peninsula of Gargaino, the spur of Italy's jack-boot.

As the armies pressed northward rain and mud, more than the substantial Panzer reinforcements, held up their progress; and more still the nature of the country, ideal for a defensive campaign, supremely difficult for the attacker.

This was a very different proposition from the Desert. No wide flanking sweeps here; no "swanning" across limitless dunes and plains. One defile between mountains, one road cut, as likely as not, on a shelf half way up a sheer cliff, was often the only possible way forward for a whole division. At every step a fresh river foamed across the path of the advance; winding so tortuously that (as with the Volturno on the westward front) it might have to be crossed three times.

As they retired the Germans blew every bridge, cut every shelf-road; pinpointing with their long-range guns each spot which the Engineers would have to repair. Sappers, working with courage and determination in the face of great danger, had cause to bless some unnamed benefactor who, marrying a bulldozer to a Sherman tank, produced the "tankdozer", a contrivance which gave their forward parties at all events some degree of cover.

By late November 1943, in a long-drawn-out operation which soldiers of 78 Division will ever remember, the Sangro had been crossed and its valley spanned, in early December, by the enormous Montgomery Bridge.

Supply problems were intensified when, on 2 December, the Luftwaffe gave the British rear echelons a reminder that they still had a kick left, and inflicted what was probably the worst purely military setback the Allies suffered at their hands during the entire war. A lucky hit on an ammunition ship destroyed 16 vessels in

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OPPOSITE

12 REGIMENT

CENTRE: *Lt.-Col. J. A. T. Barstow, commanding.*

ABOVE, LEFT: *Capt. J. M. Austin-Smith.* RIGHT: *Lieut. E. C. Freeman*(k).

BELOW, LEFT: *Capt. K. Hunt.* RIGHT: *Major Cecil Middleton, B.C. F Battery.*

Bari harbour. One of these was loaded (for reprisals, in case the Germans once more flouted the Geneva convention) with mustard gas, whose fumes a providential off-shore wind dissipated over the sea.

By Christmas 1943 the Germans had answered the question on which the future of the campaign depended. Would they try to maintain their grip on Italy by holding a line well to the south? Or would they economise their forces by a fighting retreat of 250 miles, to make their stand on the seemingly impregnable barrier formed by the Apennines as they sweep across Italy from Pesaro on the Adriatic to Pisa on the western coast? The dogged resistance that faced both the Allied armies showed that they had chosen the former course and meant to hold the narrowest neck of Italy as their Winter Line.

Here, as they faced this line, General Montgomery said farewell to 8 Army at the turn of the year. Exchanging his battle caravan for the Overlord planning room in St. Paul's School, he was able to write: "In the battles we have fought together we have not had one single failure".

For General Leese, who succeeded him in the command of 8 Army, and for General Alexander, carrying the burden of the whole Italian campaign, there was tough going ahead. There seemed nothing for it but costly head-on attacks against mountain fastnesses honeycombed with snug defences blasted into the solid rock. Hence Operation Shingle, the landing on the Anzio shore. It took six divisions four weeks of slow but vicious slogging before they were secure in their bridgehead, 20 miles wide and seven deep.

For the first three months of 1944 General Alexander hammered against the Winter Line; then halted to rest and regroup his battle-worn troops. On 11 May, concentrating his strength west of the Apennines, he struck the enemy an unexpected blow. In the brilliant action which followed he conquered the thrice-contested buttress of Monte Cassino (the Poles crawled up the mountain to subdue the monastery-fortress) and had carried his troops by 27 May to the Alban Hills, almost within sight of Rome.

It was on that date that 11 Regiment disembarked at Taranto to begin the third and final stage of their war service.

NOTE TO CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

[1] Nevertheless, in October 1944, General Eisenhower's 11 divisions were holding down a German force twice that size; and because of the threat of a landing somewhere on his long sea flanks Hitler had to keep 10 divisions idle in North Italy at a time when the Russians were pressing heavily.

27. "RIVERS IN HIGH PLACES"[1]

May—September 1944

By the time the Regiment came into action, the enemy had fallen back to the Gothic Line. This stretched across another narrow neck of Italy, some 80 miles as the crow flies. Nature had done her best to render it impregnable. The Apennines, curving north, thrust out their foothills almost to the Adriatic shore; then swept in a flat arc to line the opposite coast. Rivers innumerable—so obscure, many of them, that neither atlas nor guidebook names them; but each one a formidable barrier to an advancing army—foamed across the path of General Alexander's troops. For seven months, from their first fight on the River Conca to their last round fired across the River Po, the Regiment were almost continuously in action. Their casualties included 14 killed. They won 15 decorations.

Their first task on landing was to practise, in the Altamura area, the new technique of tank-and-infantry co-operation which the close country and natural obstacles of the Italian terrain required. A most unfortunate incident marred the training, when a shell, which had "drifted" some 18 degrees owing to a split driving band, burst near a group of spectators, wounding Brigadier Goodbody, the C.R.A., and two others and killing the Brigadier's driver.

Soon, however, the Regiment were called on, as other fighting units had been, to eke out the overworked Lines of Communication troops by running transit camps at Taranto and elsewhere while their transport and drivers were detached to operate a M.T. column on the long and difficult forward supply line.

With some envy and dejection, the men temporarily allocated to Base duties watched the embarkation of the Fighting French for the assault on Southern France. They did not and could not know that they were witnessing the start of an operation whose tragic consequences would endure for generations.

With a foresight which the free nations of Western, and the oppressed satellites of Eastern Europe have had bitter reason to appreciate, Mr. Winston Churchill had pleaded that General

Alexander's campaign in Italy should be backed with every possible encouragement so that, overflowing round the head of the Adriatic, it might rescue the Balkans from the present tyranny of Hitler and the future domination of Russia. Instead, seven divisions had been withdrawn from General Alexander's command.

What this cost Europe in later years is summed up by an American who had good reason to realise its effects—General Mark Clark, commander of the Fifth U.S. Army in Italy. This is the view he took—both in June, when the Anvil campaign was debated, and later, when the harm had been done:[2]

"A campaign that might have changed the whole history of relations between the Western world and the Soviet Union was permitted to fade away, not into nothing, but into much less than it could have been . . . Not alone in my opinion, but in the opinion of a number of experts who were close to the problem,[3] the weakening of the campaign in Italy in order to invade Southern France, instead of pushing on into the Balkans, was one of the outstanding political mistakes of the War . . . Had we been there before the Red Army, not only would the collapse of Germany have come sooner, but the influence of Soviet Russia would have been drastically reduced."

No such reflections were in the minds of 11 Regiment, however, as they lined the quayside as a guard of honour to General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny. Their chief concern was to get back to their proper job in the firing line—though the Base authorities were warm in praise of their work at the transit camps.

Their chief apprehension concerned the prevailing rumour, shortly to prove true, that they were to exchange their Priests for a new weapon, the Sexton, a Canadian tank mounting a 25-pounder gun. The 105-mm. gun of the Priest, its flashless propellant and accurate air-burst fuze had long endeared it to the Regiment; and the all-metal tracks of the Sexton gave trouble from the beginning, till they were exchanged for rubbered ones.

In August the long awaited orders came and the Regiment moved north, via Pedaso (where they calibrated their 25-pounders) and Porto Civitanova, to rejoin 1 Armoured Division at Jesi. After a sleepless week concluding with two successive night marches they took their place in an attack on the Gothic Line in the direction of Cesena, crossing the River Conca near Morciano. On the last stage of their approach march they made the acquaintance of a new partner, their Air O.P. pilot, who jauntily proposed to join them in whatever battle position they might find, "taking pot luck" about landing.

Neither 46 Division's infantry attack, nor 1 Armoured Division's follow-through from the Conca bridgehead, could do more than dent the outer defences of the German line. Firmly seated on the heights of Montescudo, Gemmano, Monte Colombo and the tiny hill-girt "neutral" state of San Marino, the Germans plastered the scanty approach roads with heavy fire.

Such narrow, ditch-lined tracks as were available were abundantly mined. The alternative was sticky ploughland: while ambushes in vineyards and rocky crannies harassed the tanks with machine-gun fire and bazookas as the Bays and 10 Hussars, supported by the Regiment's fire, made their advance; their tanks strewn with a bacchic camouflage of vines laden with luscious grapes.

As the leading squadron of the Bays pressed on, each tank covering, as far as it could, its neighbour, a bridge was blown behind them. Far from reaching their preliminary objective of Coriano, the Brigade had a desperate struggle throughout 4 September to maintain their position at San Clemente on the Apennines' northernmost spur.

Throughout 5 September 9 Lancers, precariously holding their newly won ground on the next spur, San Savino, encountered a fierce counter-attack from Croce on their left.

The "White House" was the enemy's objective. Here, in a most exposed position, Major Morris of E Battery directed fire all day, first from a jeep, then from a scout car, his tank having broken down. All forward observing officers had been either bogged down or knocked out. Major Morris answered for them all, managing to bring no fewer than six artillery regiments—more than 40 guns of various calibre, beside his own Battery—to the aid of the squadrons.

Snipers and bazooka men threatened to envelop them; but so heavy a fire was brought down by Major Morris, and switched from point to point with such deadly precision, that every gully and ditch by which the snipers were trying to infiltrate was cleared. Shell and mortar fire and bursts from Spandau machine-guns alike failed to deflect Morris from his vigilant watch, which enabled the armour to hold their post until, late in the night, the Buffs relieved them.

Three wireless networks had to be operated to secure the volume of fire for which Major Morris was continually calling. For 15 hours they were kept going by Bombardier P. Bennett, his driver/operator. Splinters hit his vehicle; one of his batteries was destroyed. With scanty protection he was in far greater danger from snipers and bazookas than even the tank crews, who watched him admiringly as he passed his urgent but cheerful messages; between whiles fending off over-persistent snipers with his Tommy gun.

This plucky couple both received rewards for their day's work —Major Morris a bar to his M.C., Bennett the Military Medal.

The day was not without its casualties. Thirteen men were hit: one, Gunner D. Jenkins, dying of his wounds.

Some fine shooting was put in with the aid of the indefatigable Air O.P. Gunners and armoured cavalry alike decided that he was a great acquisition—spotting targets such as anti-tank guns or hull-down tanks whose attentions they had suffered without being able definitely to locate them.

Back in their leaguers, both armour and artillery were still within easy range of the enemy, who had registered by day every yard of the country between them. The whole Brigade suffered a bitter loss when the B.H.Q. Command Tank received a direct hit, killing Colonel MacDonnell who, both as Officer Commanding 9 Lancers and later as Second-in-Command of the Brigade, had established himself as a firm friend of the H.A.C.

Major Richmond was hit in the back, but carried on in great pain directing operations for two hours, refusing to be evacuated until relief arrived. Since Alamein he had been Second-in-Command, taking over command when the C.O. was wounded. This day's action was the climax to two years of fine soldiering which earned him the D.S.O.

Not only shell fire, but relays of single enemy aircraft dropping "crackerjack" anti-personnel bombs enlivened the night. By day, however, the Desert Air Force had the sky virtually to themselves as their fighter-bombers belaboured the enemy line.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

[1] Isaiah 41, 18.

From his book *Calculated Risk.*

[3] Lieut-General Bedell Smith, General Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, and General Montgomery were among the opponents of the Anvil plan.—*Three Years with Eisenhower*, by Captain Harry C. Butcher, General Eisenhower's Naval Aide, p. 546.

28. THE GOTHIC LINE

September 1944

Tired though the Germans were—and their switches of units from flank to flank told of depleted reserves—their task of defence was aided so much by the mountain terrain that General Alexander, who was up visiting the front, decided that piecemeal attacks must cease, to give place to a prepared set-piece.

Accordingly at 1800 hours on 12 September the entire artillery of 1 Armoured Division opened up and continued firing through the night attack that followed and throughout the succeeding day; 225 rounds per gun were fired by the H.A.C. Batteries.

Indeed the volume of fire throughout this campaign was an eye-opener, after the experience of the Desert. There in the wide open spaces a Regimental target had been a rare and outstanding event. Here in the cramped Italian coastal corridor it was a frequent occurrence, hardly a matter for comment. Even a divisional concentration was by no means rare: neutralising a whole area within five minutes of an O.P's call for "Uncle".

By first light on 13 September the San Savino-Passano-Coriano ridge had been captured with 1500 prisoners. The next task was to secure a bridgehead over the river Marano. To give continuous fire support to 9 Lancers and K.R.R.C. who were to attack it next day, and the Gurkhas who were to follow them, it was vital that the Regiment should occupy at once positions on the newly-won ridge, and complete a survey without delay.

To the ridge, therefore, Major Richmond led a reconnaissance and survey party, the latter under Sergeant V. H. Quinney. The surveyors worked in full view of the enemy, and under continuous fire from 105-mm. and *nebelwerfers*. Four times heavy concentrations ("stonks" was the current slang for such) were brought down on them. One, Gunner Harty, was killed, another wounded. Their first beacon had hardly been erected when it was destroyed.

Nothing, however, could deflect Quinney from completing his task, and by the time the first battery arrived the work was complete and the Regiment linked with the Divisional grid. (The result was plain when the riflemen attacked, gaining their objectives beneath a terrific supporting fire.)

More than that: Quinney kept his eye on a crossroads close at hand over which the transport of many units was obliged to pass. It was an unhealthy spot for traffic jams; Quinney had noted that an enemy mortar had it beautifully "taped". He therefore stationed himself at the spot, keeping the traffic moving and saving, no doubt, both a serious blockage and the loss of a good many vehicles. He was awarded a Military Medal for this.

Ridge by ridge V Corps pressed forward. The next, that of Ripabianca, fell to the Gurkhas and 10 Hussars, B Battery providing close support. Its capture allowed the infantry to form their bridgehead at Ospedelleto. Just as the Brigade crossed the river, intent on pressing home a decisive thrust, the heavens opened. Every track became a running stream, every field a quagmire. The attack was postponed until dawn on 20 September.

The objective, long to be remembered by the Regiment, was just one more of the innumerable mountain fingers which the Apennines stretch down towards the coast. Down this particular finger a road (beloved by tourists) joins San Marino's toy hill-top Republic with the historic city of Rimini. It runs through the village of Ceriano before plunging down to the plain. Either side of the finger tumble two more of Eastern Italy's myriad streams: to the north the Marecchia, to the south the Ausa.

At the tip of the finger a little spur sticks out northwards, like an index finger bent in beckoning. This on Army maps was point 153: its capture vital to the Army's advance. The adjoining village, at the finger joint, bore as its name the Italian equivalent of "St. Martin at Windy Corner".

At 0950 hours the Bays were ordered to attack over the ridge, down into the valley made by the bent fingertip and up to the tip itself. The high ground on their left had not been cleared, though Higher Authority apparently thought it had. As they reached their starting line a bazooka wrecked their leading tank. A squadron were sent to clear the flank. Their three tanks were promptly knocked out.

Over the sharp ridge the Bays advanced and down the steep slope; with a couple of miles to go devoid of cover, and armour-piercing shot, 75-mm. and 88-mm. shell raining on them from three directions. Every subsidiary valley (the Desert Army still called them "wadis") held its hull-down Tiger tanks, self-propelled artillery and anti-tank guns. One by one—as everyone who had seen the ground had expected—the British tanks were knocked out. As their crews baled out—those who could—they were mowed down at a few hundred yards range.

With the Bays went Captain Drage, A Battery's Forward Observing Officer, in his O.P. tank. He and his crew—Gunner W. E. Heslop and L. H. Hills—fought it to the last. They were all killed.

In Quentin Drage the Regiment lost a most gallant officer. He had been in the first disastrous action at Agebadia when, wounded, he had made his way to safety in Bedouin disguise. In the Knightsbridge shambles he had again been wounded; but had seen the Regiment, then, through their happier times, through Alamein and El Hamma, had won his M.C. beneath Kournine in Tunisia, had taken over as Adjutant in Sicily, and had rejoined A Battery three months before this, his last battle.

All the Regiment could do to mitigate this disastrous action, they did. They used every round of smoke to screen the survivors of the Bays, all the Divisional artillery joining in till they, too, had almost exhausted their stock. The Batteries fired, beside, 3022 rounds of H.E. that day. Only by a superhuman effort by the echelons and the Regiment's ammunition-carrying friends of old standing, 925 Company R.A.S.C., were they replenished up to 200 rounds per gun by nightfall.

That night the infantry cleared Point 153 and the Gurkhas crossed the Marecchia. Then came deluges of rain, bogging everything down.

It was a bitterly costly action—unnecessarily costly, as seen in the light of after years: one more example of orders given by Higher Authority who did not know the ground. It was followed by the usual consoling messages—all true enough. It had distracted the enemy's attention from the Canadians attacking San Fortunato nearer the coast. It had played a part in the capture of Rimini, which fell that night.

It had cost the Bays 64 casualties, including five officers and 13 other ranks killed, and 24 tanks. Reviewing the action years after, one can see that an equal result might have been achieved at a far less grievous price. But, to cite Frederick the Great again, the general fighting a battle has not quite so much information as the armchair historian, reviewing it after the smoke has died away.

When, after dark, 9 Lancers and 1 K.R.R.C. sent out patrols to fetch in the wounded, the derelict tanks stood wrecked on the hillside. There they stood two years later, when, at San Martino, a memorial was unveiled to those who died beneath its windy hill.

None the less, the battle of Coriano as a whole marked the turning of the Gothic Line, and opened the way to the plains.

In 26 days 8 Army had advanced 30 miles and defeated 11 German divisions. It had cost them 14,000 casualties; and replacements were not to be had. So the Balkans were not liberated; and history is the sadder therefor.

1 Armoured Division were among the victims of the inevitable retrenchment of General Alexander's armies. For lack of reinforcements they were disbanded. To the great relief, however, of 11 Regiment and their cavalry comrades, 2 Armoured Brigade were to continue as a semi-independent formation, and in the ensuing weeks, as the armies moved towards the Po valley, they came under command, successively, of 4, 46 and 56 British Infantry Divisions.

An old H.A.C. officer whom 11 Regiment still regarded as one of themselves was also killed in the long drawn battle before the Gothic Line—Captain E. M. Stevens. Having entered the Company in 1939 he had rejoined 11 Regiment just before Alamein and had successively been C.P.O. and Troop Commander in A Battery and then Technical Adjutant. Early in 1944 he had left to become the General's A.D.C., and was acting as Liaison Officer with the C.R.A. when he was killed.

29. CROSSING THE RUBICON

September 1944—*January* 1945

Morasses of mud impeded the Brigade as they moved through the bridgehead over the Marecchia which the Gurkhas had established. Sextons had to tow the Adjutant's armoured command vehicle and the Second-in-Command's half track out of deep sloughs. Though their main defence line had been broken, the enemy were by no means done for, and resisted strongly as 10 Hussars, supported by B Battery, attacked towards the important road junction of Santarchangelo, on the ancient Via Emilia.

One of the O.P. tanks became bogged. Under heavy mortar fire Major Charles, the Battery Commander, crossed the river bed in his jeep, establishing and maintaining an O.P. with the leading squadron until a relief arrived.

Captain J. D. Henderson played an important part in the same attack. A hill ahead of him offered a commanding view; but it was completely under enemy observation and only a short distance from the enemy's infantry. No O.P. tank could have reached it. Henderson walked, taking up his post in a house on the crest.

So obvious a vantage point was unlikely to escape the enemy's attention. The house was heavily shelled and badly wrecked. Henderson was wounded in the neck. He refused to leave. Throughout the day, though the house was hit thrice more, he stayed there, sending back invaluable information of the enemy's movements; bringing down a concentration of fire that dispersed a threatened counter-attack. He won the Military Cross for it.

On 25 September, E Battery's O.P.s (had they but time to think of it) did a momentous thing. They crossed the Rubicon. (Lest this should cause an outbreak of scholarly controversy—for three neighbouring streams just north of Rimini are pointed out, by various topographers, as the boundary which Julius Caesar crossed, in the reverse direction, in 49 B.C.—it may be said that within the next few days the Batteries crossed all three. But they were too busy to give them more than a passing thought.)

Rain, churning the countryside into mud, swelling each stream into a torrent, and washing away mountain tracks, slowed up the Regiment's advance for nine days, leaving them eventually 10,000 yards behind in unaccustomed peace.

Nevertheless the enemy, though retiring, did not go quietly, and his accurate shelling still made O.P. work hazardous. A burst on E Battery's right post on 9 October killed Bombardier H. L. G. Ward. He was buried in 56 Division cemetery at Santarchangelo.

Even at extreme range, Regimental Headquarters were the recipient of an unexpected bout of shelling.

It was 13 October before the Batteries got down to work again. From positions in the Casale area they looked across a broad plain to Cesena's hill, crowned with its monastery, the Germans' observation post. It was the Regiment's task on 18 October to blind this lookout with a smoke barrage 1000 yards long while first 10 Hussars and then the Bays cleared Monte Romano. Celincordia was captured to the tune of 270 rounds per gun of H.E. and 140 of smoke from 11 Regiment and on 20 October Cesena itself fell.

Still the cry was "one more river to cross". Wading neck deep, 21 Royal Fusiliers forded the Savio, on whose bank, on 23 October, a heavy outburst of mortar fire wounded Lieut. E. B. Glover and some others.

Forlimpopoli was the next place to fall. A Battery and 26 K.R.R.C. raced towards it along the main road, Captain D. R. Baker's jeep leading the way, to meet a warm welcome from the inhabitants. Sweeping on, the riflemen seized a crossing over the river Ronco, Captain Henderson going over with them as forward observing officer.

Here in the morning (27 October) the enemy turned with a vengeance. Self-propelled guns battered down the roadside houses at pointblank range, and a strong infantry attack made the bridgehead untenable. The Rifles, ordered back, found themselves cut off by a river which the rains had now swollen to a cataract. Some few who tried to swim across were carried away, while others fought hand to hand till they were overcome.

Gunner Hirst, the F.O.O.'s signaller, was wounded and taken prisoner, but not before he had smashed his wireless set. Captain Henderson himself stayed in a house with the Rifles company commander, tending the wounded, one of whom they carried to the river bank. There they ran into a Spandau. Henderson shot one of the machine-gunners and after a bit he and the company swam the river to safety.

A few days' rest, and the Regiment were back supporting 46 Division in the successful assault on Forli town. They were in position in San Martino in Strado when the joyful news came of home leave for one officer and 12 other ranks under the L.I.A.P. scheme. Now the river Rabbi, now the Montone was crossed. Each crossing involved actions which, in many wars, would have been reckoned major battles from the point of view of ammunition expenditure, though not, fortunately, of casualties. On 20 November, for example, the Regiment fired 5300 rounds in support of the Leicesters and Foresters in their capture of Castiglione.

A brisk piece of work by Lance-Bombardier Webb on 19 November saved F Troop a catastrophe. An enemy shell set some of the ammunition on fire, which Webb, with a fine disregard of danger, extinguished. He received a special commendation from the Army Commander.

An unfortunate accident in E Battery's B Echelon resulted, on 23 November, in the death of Gunner Webber.

Though it must have been obvious that they were engaged in a losing battle—and one, moreover, devoid of any particular intention or plan except the negative one of delay—the Germans fought with considerable determination, and their artillery concentrations lacked none of their former vigour.

The tightly packed bridgehead over the River Marzeno, as an instance, received such a rain of both artillery and machine-gun fire from the moment it was established on 25 November that Captain Baker, badly wounded in the head, could not be got away for six hours. Lieut. P. Middleton and his signaller were wounded on the same day.

Three days later, between the Marzeno and the Lamone, a dense and sudden concentration of 105-mm. shell fell on A and E Batteries, killing, in their Command Post, Captain Angus Grant—who had only that day taken over Captain Baker's Troop—Sergeant G. W. Smith, the popular and efficient Artificer-Sergeant, and Bombardier A. M. Pennington.

The same night saw a remarkable escape, when an O.P. tank received a direct hit. Though they objected to this rough awakening the entire crew, who had been asleep in the tank, found, on taking stock, that they had suffered no other harm.

Heavy rain had so churned up the roads on either side of the Marzeno bridge that jeeps only were allowed to use them, and even these could make no headway. An overhead ropeway was rigged across the stream, with a huge basket to carry passengers and stores. While Captain E. C. Mansel was being thus ferried over the whole thing collapsed, depositing the passengers in the mud.

Nightly, almost, the Regiment pitched their moving leaguer, not, as the hymn says, a day's march nearer home, but as far forward as daytime battles of varying ferocity permitted.

Some few days stand out: among them 7 December when 1 K.R.R.C., supported by a squadron of 9 Lancers, captured Piduera, on the high ground south-west of Faenza. It was touch and go whether the tanks, with only one possible path across the rocky hillside, and that swept by fire from Tigers only half a mile away, could reach the village.

Captain Page was the Forward Observing Officer with the leading company. His O.P. was a house 500 yards from the village and the Germans had no doubts as to its location. Enemy tanks and artillery pounded it all day. From this uncomfortable viewpoint, Captain Page decided that smoke was the only answer, and laid a screen which enabled the Lancers' tanks to seize the crest without one being knocked out.

All day, all night and throughout the next day Captain Page stuck to his observation post, the only one the Regiment had so far been able to establish. It was largely due to him that the enemy failed to dislodge the British riflemen, and he got a Military Cross for it.

His Battery Commander was naturally anxious. On the night of 7 December Major Charles decided to visit the O.P. to see whether all was well. Thrice on his way up he came under concentrated machine-gun fire, but he would not be deterred. It was by no means the first time Major Charles's leadership had come to notice. This time it earned him the Military Cross.

After two days on the ridge the Regiment were able to get two more officers forward to observe—Captains Henderson and Young; and very necessary they proved. Violent counter-attacks had been the rule, whenever the Allies made any significant progress. This day's, delivered by 90 Light and 345 Divisions, with Tiger tanks and self-propelled guns, was particularly fierce. Before noon the Regiment had fired 250 rounds per gun. By nightfall two separate attacks had been beaten back and an intercepted enemy message admitted heavy casualties.

There was a brief and pleasant interlude on 8 December when —fortunately during a quiet day in E Battery area—a mobile canteen arrived, giving the Battery the welcome excitement of a lady guest for lunch.

Next day Fate provided further, but less congenial, light relief. The Battery Captain had been ordering up ammunition since early morning, using what, to the gunners, was the normal term—"Bricks". He was delighted to see his lorries arrive in good time; not so delighted, however, to find that they *did* contain bricks—real ones. They were hurriedly dumped in the mud and the lorries sent back, not without some slight cursing, for fresh supplies of a more warlike kind.

The independent role allotted to 2 Armoured Brigade meant, in effect, "double shifts". When the infantry who had been in action during the past few days were relieved by 2 New Zealand and 10 Indian Divisions, the Bays and A Battery supported the former, and 9 Lancers with E Battery the latter in a fierce fight for the stronghold of Celle. The Regiment contributed 387 rounds per gun to the terrific barrage which preceded the attack.

Heavy counter-attacks with flame-throwers set the Indians back; but the Germans were only fighting for time while they withdrew across the river Senio. Nevertheless, they fought with determination. Major Morris and his companions in E Battery Command Post had their house brought down on top of them and three men were buried in a slit trench by a near miss. They probably owed their lives to the quick initiative of Battery Sergeant Major Finch, who dug them out with his hands.

At length the Gurkhas and New Zealanders secured Faenza and B and E Batteries were switched on 20 December to another trouble-spot north of the town, where 159 Brigade had still not managed to fight a passage across the Lamone.

In a shell-torn landscape reminiscent of the 1914-18 war they received Christmas greetings in the form of two direct hits on A Battery's command post, one on B Battery's O.P. and a heavy concentration on Regimental H.Q.—all astonishingly unattended by casualties.

The Regiment, though still in the line, spent a quiet and convivial Christmas—their fourth abroad—in the shelter of local farmhouses. Across the way the Germans were also observing the festive season, judging by the silence on the whole front.

The C.O. and R.S.M., a modern Wenceslas and page, trudged through the slush and light snow to pass the time of day with every sub-unit. Boxing Day was quiet, too; and though the following day brought a resumption of business in the form of considerable shelling of the area, there were again no casualties.

On 28 December the Regiment were not so lucky. Bombardier Parsons and Lance-Bombardier Tucker had the misfortune to walk into an unlocated minefield near their troop positions. Parsons had his leg blown off below the knee. Tucker, wounded, managed to get back. Thinking they had been hit by a shell, he so reported to Sergeant Leishman, who took out a party to bring in Parsons. They, too, trod on a mine which wounded two N.C.O.s and a gunner.

Lieut. G. F. Moore, the gun position officer, now brought up a mine detector: but it would function only with metal mines, and these proved to be of the wooden-box type, interspersed with concrete picket and other types. The old fashioned and dangerous method of prodding was the only recourse, and even that was rendered unduly difficult by the hardness of the frozen ground.

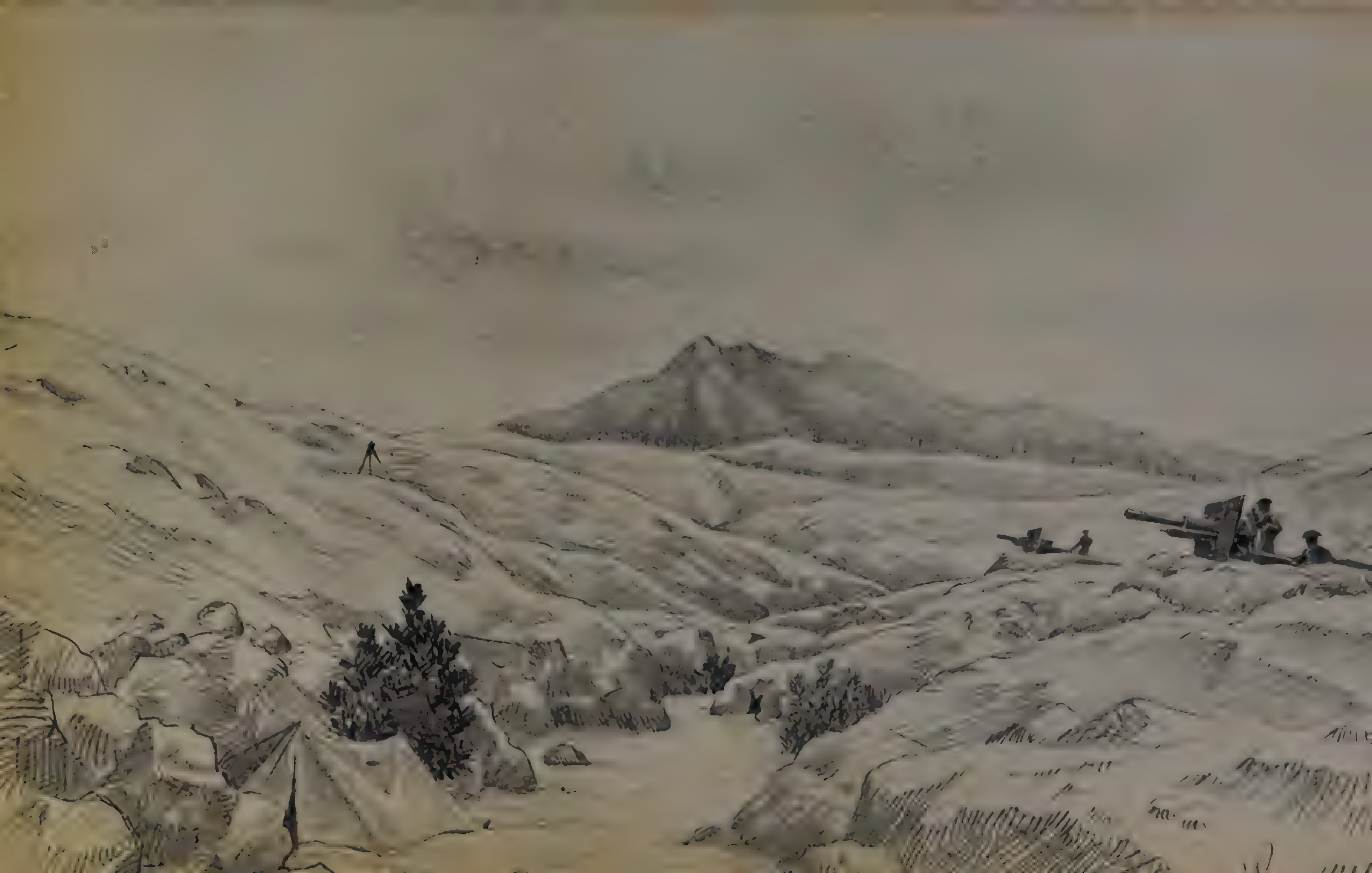
It was pitch dark, with temperature below freezing point. Accompanied by a volunteer, Gunner J. Waters, a signaller from the command post, Lieut. Moore set out again. For 40 minutes he was in the minefield, marking his path with paper. He reached the wounded N.C.O., whose wound Waters dressed with the Red Cross satchel he carried. Both men won the George Medal.

The Regiment less B Battery were now withdrawn to rest camp at Pesaro. Some changes occurred just before the move, Major Morris taking over Second-in-Command from Major Richmond, who had been posted home to command a regiment, while Major E. C. Mansel succeeded to the command of E Battery.

While the rest were celebrating the New Year in the customary way, B Battery with 10 Hussars took part in a surprise attack by 56 Division which cleared out all Germans south of the Senio. The infantry (2/6 Queens) rode to battle in Kangaroos—turretless Shermans driven by men of 4 Hussars. They caught the crew of a self-propelled gun at breakfast and put them "in the bag", knocking out two others and passing back 300 prisoners. That done, B Battery rejoined the Regiment.

OPPOSITE

Colonel the Earl of Galway, G.C.M.G., D.S.O., O.B.E., Colonel Commandant H.A.C. 1933-35.



30. PER MARE ET PER TERRAM

February—April 1945

One more battle lay ahead—but two months ahead. For those two months, like their comrades in the armoured cavalry, the Regiment turned their hands to many unaccustomed tasks and came under the command of a variety of formations.

With one battery kept ready for action, the rest sweated mightily at navvying in the area around Villanova. The roads, churned by months of rain and loads they were never designed to carry, had what was left of their metalling buried beneath a two-foot layer of mud. They were in no state to support the new offensive which General Alexander was determined to mount. As a relaxation from roadmaking, there was the picqueting—one night on, one night off—of the front line, now quiescent except for an occasional outburst of hate by the Germans or reconnaissance in force by the Allies.

Quite a few changes took place during this quiet spell. Major Kenneth Bolton, after a turn as Adjutant, took over A Battery from Major Dudley-Smith, posted to the United Kingdom. Captain Thomson-Glover succeeded as Adjutant. Then Major Charles was posted home. Major J. G. Parker, who had only recently joined the Regiment with a number of ex-Anti-Aircraft officers, assumed command of B Battery.

Meanwhile the Regiment passed under a never-ending series of commands: from 56 Division to 1 Canadian and then 8 Indian Division; next to the newly arrived Jewish Brigade. A and E Batteries returned to their normal role to put down a H.E. and smoke barrage over the Fosse Vetro, where a platoon of 2 Palestine Regiment, pushed across the Fosse in a reconnaissance, had been pinned down by mortar and machine-gun fire. After this action the Jewish Brigade were relieved by 21 Regiment Cremona

BELOW

12 Regiment guns in the Wadi at Sbiba. The Regiment were sent here, with the Coldstream Guards, to fill the gap after the setback sustained by U.S. 1 Armoured Division.

(Drawn by Capt. V. C Robertson)

Group of the Italian Army, now fighting on the Allies' side.

Battery and Troop commanders had been accustoming themselves, in the busy preparation area around Forli, to the heterogeneous devices which, by this time, had been added to the Army's fighting equipment—Crocodile flame-throwers and Wasps, the infantry equivalent of these; Kangaroos, whose advent was as welcome to the infantry as the introduction of Priests had been to the gunners.

Flails for mine-clearing were to have a prominent place in the new attack; "tank-dozers," "arks" and assault bridges; finally the newest arrival, "Buffaloes", armoured amphibious carriers able to overcome the water jumps which nature had provided and which the enemy, by well planned inundations, had exploited.

As was 8 Army's custom, the entire plan, and their own particular part in it, was explained to the troops on the eve of the battle; and it was this:

Ahead of the Allied armies lay the lake of Commacchio, 20 miles long, six wide; marshy, mud-fringed, seemingly impassable; separated from the Adriatic by a spit of sand: ideal protection for the enemy's left flank. Westwards the land had been flooded by the Germans, leaving a two-mile corridor, five miles long, between floods and lake. Through this corridor, the Argenta gap, the Allies must certainly pass to gain the northward plains.

Two Armies would converge at this gap, the Fifth from the centre, 8 Army on the lakeward side. There would be a diversionary attack on Italy's western coast; and across the lake would come an unexpected thrust, an amphibious right hook borne in the Buffaloes. To make that right hook sure, a Commando would make an amphibious assault on the spit. This the Regiment would support.

At 2000 hours on 1 April 1945 the Commando set sail, running aground almost at once on a sandbank 500 yards off shore. When they did land, just before dawn, their attack, supported by the Regiment's guns, succeeded almost at once. Many Germans were killed, nine guns and 600 prisoners taken and the southern part of the spit overrun.

Having covered them half-way up the spit the Regiment withdrew, swinging left round the lake to support 56 Division as they crossed the Reno. Throughout the night 5/6 April the Batteries were firing almost continuously till, on the evening of 6 April, they switched again (leaving dummy Sextons in their old position to deceive the enemy) to support the New Zealanders in their imminent all-out attack across the Senio.

The enemy greeted them with a two-hours' concentration on the battery area, setting alight 60 boxes of charges. But for the fine work of Lieut. R. W. S. Wigmore and Gunner Strange, who put out fires regardless of danger, there might have been many casualties.

Enormous quantities of ammunition were required for each of the three positions in which the Regiment came into action, and bringing it forward over the exposed approach roads called for considerable determination.

A Battery's position across the Three Wise Men bridge over the Senio, itself under machine-gun fire and in an area littered with unlocated mines, was particularly difficult to get at, and Captain Sewell did splendid work in leading up an ammunition and petrol convoy, under heavy and prolonged harassing fire which set dumps blazing all around. Those of the Regiment were lucky not to be hit; and by the time the action began they had 1040 rounds per gun available.

Battery Sergeant Major Robert Hall was another who distinguished himself. Indeed, for nine days and nights he worked non-stop with virtually no sleep, carrying out his other varied duties by day and dumping ammunition by night. His unceasing devotion to duty won him the Military Medal.

Waves of heavy bombers and fighter-bombers flew over the gun positions on 9 April to begin the assault on the Argenta gap. As soon as they had passed, the Batteries added their own contribution, firing 13,000 rounds in nine hours' continuous bombardment. Just before light on 12 April the Bays, with A Battery's O.P., crossed the Santerno.

By dawn next day the entire 2 Armoured Brigade were over the river. Enemy self-propelled guns and infantry contested every step, and the attacking infantry in their Kangaroos needed constant successions of smoke screens and fire plans. On 15 April the Regiment took on another task, firing a five-hour barrage to help 56 Division as they converged with 76 Division on Bastia. So efficiently did the echelons work that not once did the Regiment have to dip into their first-line supply of shell.

Thrusting northward from Filo with C Squadron 10 Hussars and 2/7 Queens, B Battery owed a great deal to their Forward Observing Officer, Captain Robin Smith. He was moving with the leading troop when they ran into an enemy S.P. gun. An instant smoke screen, brought down by Captain Smith's direction, enabled the troop to get to cover and choose another route.

Time and again in the next three days, as the advance pressed forward—to Fossa Marina, to Fossa Benignante—Captain Smith gave the same timely aid. The attack swung round, across a network of rivers and canals, to cut the main road north of Argenta. His tank was blown up by a demolition charge. Though shaken, he immediately borrowed another tank and carried on; remaining after the assaulting troops had been relieved, to support their successors, using his own tank gun with effect. Thus Captain Smith earned a bar to the Military Cross which he had already won.

Leapfrogging forward battery by battery, the Regiment found themselves, by last light on 21 April, the only guns within range of the advancing battle line, and at times they were called on to cover a frontage of nearly 270 degrees. Though the enemy were breaking—as seen by the columns of prisoners marching back through the British lines—the determined snipers they left behind gave a deal of trouble. The sturdy armour plate of the Sextons proved its worth, however, and there was only one casualty from snipers throughout the action.

An enterprising dash towards Porto Maggiore by 9 Lancers brought them, with A and E Batteries in close attendance, several miles ahead, and was rewarded by the capture of four tanks, five 88-mm. guns and a 150-mm. gun which the Regiment took over. Directed by the Air O.P., they did some accurate shooting with it.

This air co-operation was a notable feature of the battle. A day or two earlier, A Battery had brewed up an enemy tank with a direct hit. Now B Battery by the same means knocked out an anti-tank gun. An unfortunate mishap in B Battery marred the day—a premature, which cost the life of Gunner W. Morrisson and wounded two others.

As the advance reached Contrapo, Captain Sewell was again to the fore, driving a jeep through intense shell and mortar fire to establish an O.P. there. The same evening he crossed the Po di Volano—last barrier before the Po Grande itself—by jeep ferry to supply another O.P. near Correggio.[1] This was the climax of 18 months' work, for his skill and coolness in directing fire had been notable all the way from Alamein to Tunis. Now it received its recognition in the award of the Military Cross.

Throughout their advance Major Mansel had kept the Lancers' casualties to a minimum by the speed with which he brought down the fire, not only of E Battery but of the whole Regiment and a Field Regiment as well, on every enemy post that barred their way. For two nights and days he did not sleep, for the Lancers' spearhead was now directed westwards to a fresh task—to round up from the Ferrara direction the enemy troops who, in something approaching confusion, were trying to hold the Po crossing at Pollesella long enough to get their rearguard across.

Thanks to E Battery's quick and accurate fire, 9 Lancers and the London Irish were able by nightfall on 24 April to shut in the enemy's bridgehead until it was within 3000 yards of the Po. Major Mansel's share in this was rewarded with the Military Cross.

Huge concentrations of enemy M.T. had reached the bridgehead, but they did not get across. The array of battered and abandoned equipment at Zocca was clear evidence of the utter defeat the enemy had suffered.

As day dawned on 25 April Captain Young, reaching a viewpoint at Borgo with B Squadron of the Bays, was firing A Battery across the river. Throughout the past week of battle he had disregarded anti-tank fire and sniping to maintain his post with the leading tank, bringing down observed fire whenever the armour was held up.

His tank had been hit at the Santerno, but he had run it for cover behind a farm. There were signs of movement in the building ahead of him. He put his Browning on to it, and out came 16 fully-armed Germans to surrender. He took over their building and, directing fire on an awkward defile where a bridge had been blown, helped to bring forward the armour, whose appearance was the signal for the surrender of another 60 Germans.

These rounds across the river were the last the Regiment fired in the war against Germany. Captain Young's Military Cross was a memento of the occasion.

The day's work marked the culmination, too, of Lieut.-Colonel Slade-Powell's year in command of 11 Regiment. During the difficult days of the Senio crossing, as the C.R.A.'s representative with 2 Armoured Brigade, he had controlled the fire plans on an 8000-yard front, including the air observation work. Throughout the Italian campaign he had set a fine example, both in his personal reconnaissances and his constant visits to the gun areas; and had shewn, at the same time, great command of gunnery organisation and technique. Now his reward came in the shape of the Distinguished Service Order.

At 1030 hours on 25 April, Regimental Headquarters ordered "Cease Fire".

NOTE TO CHAPTER THIRTY

The best gun position of the war, the gunners declared.

31. ENVOI

May—December 1945

All ranks were disappointed not to take part in the pursuit across the Po and the Lombardy Plains; but as it turned out resistance north of the river was negligible.

From the Commando attack on the Spit to the Po the Regiment had fired more than 42,000 rounds of H.E. in this final battle, besides 4500 rounds of smoke. Casualties had been astonishingly few. Apart from the three due to B Battery's unfortunate premature the Regiment had lost one killed—Lance-Bombardier A. Duckworth of E Battery—and four other ranks wounded.

South of Ferrara on 2 May the Regiment celebrated victory in Italy with church services and sports. Nearly a million men, in this theatre, had laid down their arms in unconditional surrender. Six days later fresh celebrations marked victory in Europe.

Some 200 who took part in these ceremonies and junketings were "originals" who had landed with the Regiment in 1941.

Lieut. P. I. Rainey had just time to win the Piccolo Plate at the Ferrara race meeting on 19 May and Major Mansel the Visitors' Race, when the Regiment were ordered north.

Skirting Venice they marched to Palmanova, with B Battery some way further east on the Isonzo. For A Battery Skrbina, just north of Trieste, was a halting place: B Battery accompanied 10 Hussars to Comeno. Then up into Austria, where the Carinthian valley of the Gurk expands into the iron-mine district of the Krappenfeld.

Having made war for two and a half years, their task was now to help keep the peace in the territories whose political future hung in the balance, where Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia meet.

Then, the anti-climax. The Regiment that had been, throughout their battle career, a band of brothers, gradually dissolved. There was no spectacular march home to Armoury House. Instead, a gradual posting away of personnel to other units till, on 31 December 1945, there ceased to be an 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A.; merely a party of officers and other ranks waiting to make their way home by the leave route.

12 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT R.H.A.

1. GROWING PAINS

May 1939—*October* 1942

IT is recorded in ancient legend that the Goddess Athene came to birth by springing fully armed from the head of Zeus with a mighty war shout.

The birth of 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A., on 8 May 1939, in no wise partook of this classic example. True, the duplication of the Territorial Army—to which the Regiment owed their origin—was a feat conjured up out of the head of the Secretary of State for War; but 12 Regiment did not emerge fully armed. In fact, they emerged not armed at all. The thousands of artillery weapons which gunner units had returned to store at the end of the 1914-18 war had been cut up and melted down for scrap in the feckless inter-war years, and the equipment available for 12 Regiment when they were summoned into existence was precisely nil.

First orders for the new unit were issued on 22 June, shewing Major J. A. Hill as acting C.O., with Majors D. D. Angus and G. V. Lazenby commanding, respectively, C and D Batteries, and Captain H. S. Armstrong as Adjutant. It is a key to the disheartening confusion in which the Regiment's early days were spent that not one of these officers—all old H.A.C. men except the Adjutant—remained with the new-born unit for more than five months. One officer, however, who joined the Regiment about that time was destined to remain with them throughout their embryonic days—Lieut.-Colonel G. R. N. Heseltine, R.H.A., their first commander.

The 129 other ranks who were embodied on 25 August as a "key party" spent their time in the task, typical of the times, of digging "Passive Air Raid Defences", in the form of shelter trenches, in the Artillery Garden; in which, on 3 September, the Regiment took cover when, a few hours after the declaration of war, the siren uttered its first alarming shriek over London.

By that time the Regiment had reached full strength as far as other ranks were concerned. For the few remaining days of their stay at Armoury House they borrowed equipment when they could from their parents, 11 Regiment; but even five months later they were still training with wooden directors and dummy dial sights, the Numbers Four kneeling and loading imaginary guns with imaginary projectiles.

To their great relief—and no less to the relief of the harassed denizens of Armoury House—they moved, when the war was five days old, to billets in Boreham Wood, near Elstree. There an officer reported for duty who was to remain with 12 Regiment throughout the war and command them for most of their battle career—Captain J. A. T. Barstow. He had served in B Battery since 1929, and was now posted from 11 Regiment to command D Battery.

Less than two months after their departure, seven officers and 214 other ranks were recalled to London. Old members of the Company, mindful of the opening days of the earlier war, chuckled grimly to learn on what duties they were to be employed—the guarding of Vulnerable Points.

How these V.P.s were selected; to what particular perils they were considered vulnerable; whether, indeed, the whole party was not conjured up by a rather unimaginative London District to keep out of mischief units for whom they could provide neither equipment nor occupation, were as much matters for conjecture as they had been in 1914, when the Brixton waterworks, Wapping Tunnel and the Newgate-street front of the General Post Office had been selected as suitable sites for Battalion sentries.

Be that as it may, the Regiment found themselves guarding, through the bitter winter of 1939-40, points as diverse as an ammunition dump at Banstead, Surrey Docks, King's Cross tunnel, Hackney Downs station, and depots at Deptford and Rotherhithe.

Those who took part, and remained to experience the more momentous operations of the African and Italian wars, were convinced that, of the medals they ultimately wore, the Defence Medal which commemorated these early vigilances was the hardest earned. Nor was it earned without danger, as those will attest who, with due precautions as to traffic, popped through a trapdoor between the "down" lines to guard the railway at Queens Road, Battersea, through many murky nights.

Enviously, in April, the Regiment watched their comrades of 11 Regiment entrain from Boreham for a more realistic war station on the coast at Swanage. Their send-off was marked by a slight contretemps. Their guard of honour had stationed themselves near the engine of the troop train, reckoning that even a troop train would proceed front end first. The train, however, backed out of the station, leaving the carefully-drilled guard of honour high and dry. When it had backed half a mile the train returned and military compliments, including "Regimental Fire" given by the now acclimatised C.O., were duly rendered.

Before the month was over 12 Regiment, too, had made a move—to Skegness. Pre-war posters, which described that resort as "so bracing", were to some extent borne out when the Regiment received the thrilling news that they were to draw their first real equipment—eight 18-pounder guns. It was nevertheless as infantry that they stood to when the code word Caesar announced that invasion was imminent. The C.O., at that moment in London, was recalled, and with 10 rounds of small arms ammunition per man the Regiment prepared to defend a large area of Lincolnshire. To everybody's relief, 250 rounds per man were issued during the day; followed by the news that this was only a practice warning.

Equipped and organised now as a 4.5-in. howitzer Troop and an 18-pounder Troop, the Regiment were at last, in May 1940, to take their part in realistic defence training; disrupted, however, by a constant flow of other ranks selected for commissions.

Of the new drafts who replaced them one in particular played an important part in building up the Regiment's efficiency. It was the plan, after Dunkirk, to post regulars and reservists with battle experience to units which had not yet served abroad. Under this scheme two officers—Captain J. Harington and Lieut. H. H. Craig—and about 40 N.C.O.s and other ranks, who had served in France with 2 R.H.A., came to 12 Regiment. B.S.M.s Oliphant, Pearston and Harris and Sergeant Stean were among the members of this draft who made their mark on the Regiment's history.

By October 1940 virtually the whole of the original personnel had passed on to officer training units, and entire pages of the war diaries were mere catalogues of officers' cross postings.

Despite these changes, training continued through the summer—individual, troop, battery—until the Regiment were ready for Brigade exercises under 2 Armoured Division. Harbouring in such times provided a picturesque if unconventional spectacle as sub-units manœuvred into place their motley collection of transport—civilian cars, butchers' vans, brewery lorries gradually shedding their bacchic character to assume a distant likeness to artillery vehicles.

A spell of anti-invasion exercises under 2 Armoured Reconnaissance Brigade, in company with 12 Lancers and 4/7 Dragoon Guards mounted on quasi-armoured cars known as Beaverettes, was followed by practice camp at Larkhill (made possible by much borrowing of equipment).

On 1 November 1940, 12 Regiment found their permanent niche when they joined, at Kingston Bagpuize—where the Berkshire downs roll into Oxfordshire—the newly created formation in which they were henceforth to serve, 6 Armoured Division.

Lieut.-Colonel Guy Heseltine now relinquished command. Not only his Regiment but the Army in general owed this officer a debt. The pains he had spent in training his unit, in the difficult days when there was virtually nothing to train with, were matched, later, by his care and skill in selecting men for commissions and guiding them to the arm where they could best serve. Those of his men who came back, as many did, to the Company's linked artillery units did much to retain, in each of them, a strong H.A.C. spirit.

The new Commanding Officer was Lieut.-Colonel P. L. Graham, who for nearly two years moulded 12 Regiment into readiness for war. That month, too, the third Battery came into existence—F—under Major Harington.

Now a further inroad on the Regiment's personnel—the formation of 13 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A.—carried off a batch of officers, including Major E. A. Mortleman, the Second-in-Command, a B Battery veteran whose H.A.C. service dated from 1914.

Fresh drafts to fill the Regiment's ranks included some 150 Scottish infantrymen. They soon became excellent gunners; two at least—Sergeants Lawrie and Ainslie—winning decorations.

Surveyors, a Light Aid Detachment of R.E.M.E. and at length, in March 1941, the advent of 25-pounders brought equipment virtually to a war footing. Only one 18-pounder and one 4.5 howitzer troop retained the obsolescent gear which had served for training. When on 6 March 1941 the Regiment, standing stiffly in the driving snow, paraded before the Duke of Gloucester, they were a Royal Horse Artillery Regiment armed as for battle.

By then they had moved to East Anglia, where they were to remain—at Huntingdon, at Hinxton and at Shelford—for a year. It was a year spent in strenuous preparation: in exercises innumerable—Bulldog and Bumper, Scorch and Armour. Now indeed a mobile fighting unit, the Regiment ranged the country, in marches of 200 miles or more, manœuvring and shooting in terrain as diverse as Fargo Down on Salisbury Plain, Senny Bridge where the Usk winds among the Welsh hills, Hunstanton for a co-operation course with the Royal Air Force.

Games galore alternated with inspections almost as numerous. They had a visit from Lord Galway, their Colonel Commandant. On 12 September 1941, at Lakenheath, they paraded for an "Inspecting Officer" who was un-named in orders, and found themselves in the presence of the King, their Captain General.

A march to Ayr in April 1942 (326 miles without any serious mechanical breakdown) set speculation afoot; the more so, since the day after their arrival the Regiment moved to Rothesay for practice in loading the Royal Navy's Tank Landing Craft assembled there. There was, moreover, a searching enquiry to ascertain who could swim, and how well. Crusader tanks arrived in June. Renewed exercises in rapid succession—Schuyt, Flail, Stymie, Fist and at last, in August 1942, Dryshod—pointed each more emphatically to an imminent move overseas, an opposed landing *somewhere*.

The veil was only partially raised in August. Lieut.-Colonel "Ludo" Graham handed over command. What the Regiment owed to this resourceful and outspoken gunner was evident when his theories on the use of artillery in support of armour were tested and triumphantly vindicated in battle.

Lieut.-Colonel G. W. Mansell, his successor, informed all ranks, on his first parade, that 6 Armoured Division were liable to go abroad "in an easterly direction".

What that direction might be was still the subject of many and varied conjectures, as vehicles were camouflaged in shades of light and dark brown, and the troops listened, in late September, to a lecture by Brigadier H. B. Latham, R.H.A., on German tactics in the Middle East. Once more there was a warning order that "an important personage" was about to inspect: and in Dam Park Camp on 15 October the Regiment again paraded before the King.

Within 10 days the order came. C Battery were to proceed to Glasgow, their port of embarkation. They left on 29 October 1942—Major J. Grose commanding; Captain S. N. Rae as Battery Captain; with Captains A. G. P. Lincoln, and H. G. St. G. Pollock, Lieuts. K. Hunt, H. E. Chubb, H. N. Atherton, I. G. Miller, E. A. Forestier-Walker, and T. N. W. Lacey.

On 8 November the remainder of the Regiment embarked at Liverpool in m.v. *Staffordshire* and m.t. *Orion* and sailed to the Firth of Clyde to join Convoy K.M.2; gunners from 12 Regiment manning their ships' forward guns throughout the voyage.

2. TORCH

For many and diverse reasons the invasion of North Africa, the project named Torch, stands out as unique in military history. It achieved a strategic surprise never surpassed. It was marked by an integration of allied armies, navies and air fleets, under a single command, undreamed of in any previous campaign. More cogent still, it was planned and executed against a strategic and political background so intricate and uncertain as to defy prophecy and preclude singleness of purpose.

It was finally decided upon in July 1942. Seldom in history had an alliance, destined to ultimate victory, faced so bleak an outlook. The Russians, having brought their fate on themselves by letting Hitler loose on Poland and standing aloof while the French army was destroyed, were now screaming for the "Second Front" which they had denied the Allies in their hour of need. Barely freed from the menace against Moscow, they now faced another, as mighty Nazi armies converged on Stalingrad.

Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria were prostrate under the jackboot. To the eastward the Japanese, with Hong Kong and Singapore in their grasp, and the last American foothold in the Philippines dislodged by the fall of Corregidor, seemed to have China at their mercy and Burma and India sheltered from their next advance only by the jungle defences nature had provided.

From the Pyrenees to the Riviera the government of Vichy France, torn by terror and treachery, held the north Mediterranean shore, with the question mark of a powerful fleet poised at Toulon.

Driven from Libya in the Knightsbridge disaster, Auchinleck's armies, panting for second wind, dug their "last stand" defences across the Alamein gateway of Egypt.

These were problems enough. There remained others even less tangible: the attitude of Spain; the attitude of the French in North Africa. Would Franco end at last his two-year haggling with the Axis and give free passage—even, perhaps, active aid—to a German army bent on seizing Gibraltar? If the Straits were closed, could a new invasion force be supplied? Must it, then, have an Atlantic base? Could Casablanca function as such a base, pounded five days out of six by huge Atlantic rollers?

One part of the problem was decided, over General Eisenhower's head and (only instance of its kind) against his wishes, by the American Chiefs of Staff in Washington. Casablanca must be one of the three ports to be assaulted: Oran and Algiers the others.

Equally uncertain, susceptible to as many and as varied conjectures, was the reaction of North Africa's peoples: the Moors, the French civilian settlers and administrators, the not inconsiderable French armies, ill-equipped but intact, which guarded the coastwise strip. Would they resist? Would they tolerate passively, or would they welcome as brothers-in-arms the hosts which came, *inter alia*, to free them? Which, if any, of the French leaders could engage their loyalty and sway their attitude?

De Gaulle could be ruled out in any chaffering of loyalties. His insistence that a French soldier could have only one role—that of a combatant against the Nazi enemy—was itself regarded as a reproach to the honour of passive Frenchmen. Any hint of his participation would have aroused instant and determined resistance from the French armies; and, swallowing their scruples, the Allied leaders kept the expedition as secret from him, and as successfully, as they did from the enemy.

Giraud, rescued from France in a romantic submarine adventure, had met a cold reception. Darlan, however, was ready to hand—drawn to Algeria by no prescience of the part he was to play, but by the critical illness of his son. To him fell the government of French North Africa—a wise decision in which General Eisenhower, the man on the spot, brought down on his head fierce storms of denunciation in America and Britain, where Darlan's adherence to Vichy had neither been forgotten nor pardoned.

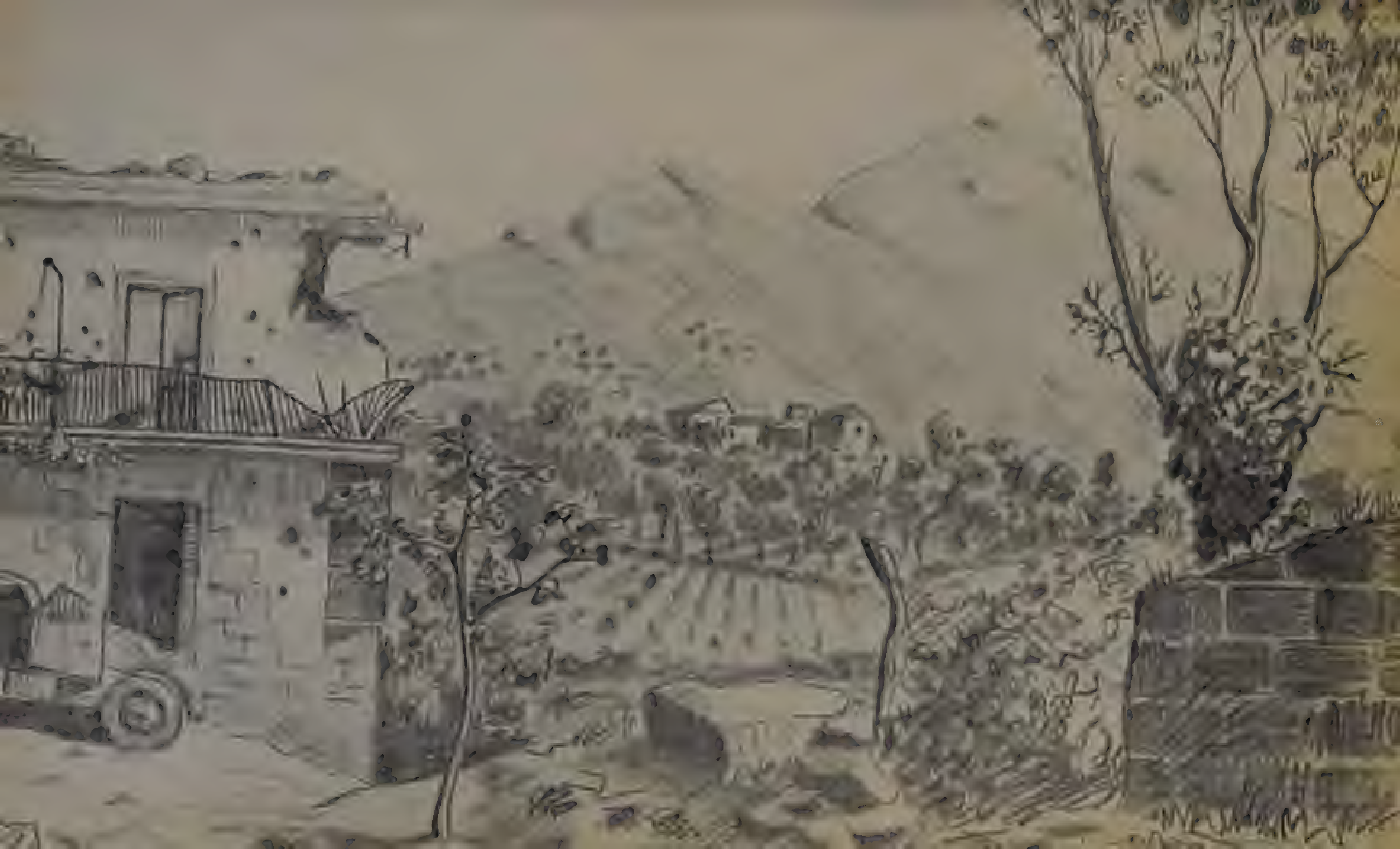
Britain was to be kept, as much as possible, out of the picture: for Britain had no truck with Vichy and had, indeed, in co-operation with de Gaulle's men, crossed swords with Vichy forces in the unsuccessful assault on Dakar and in Syria; whereas America had always had a

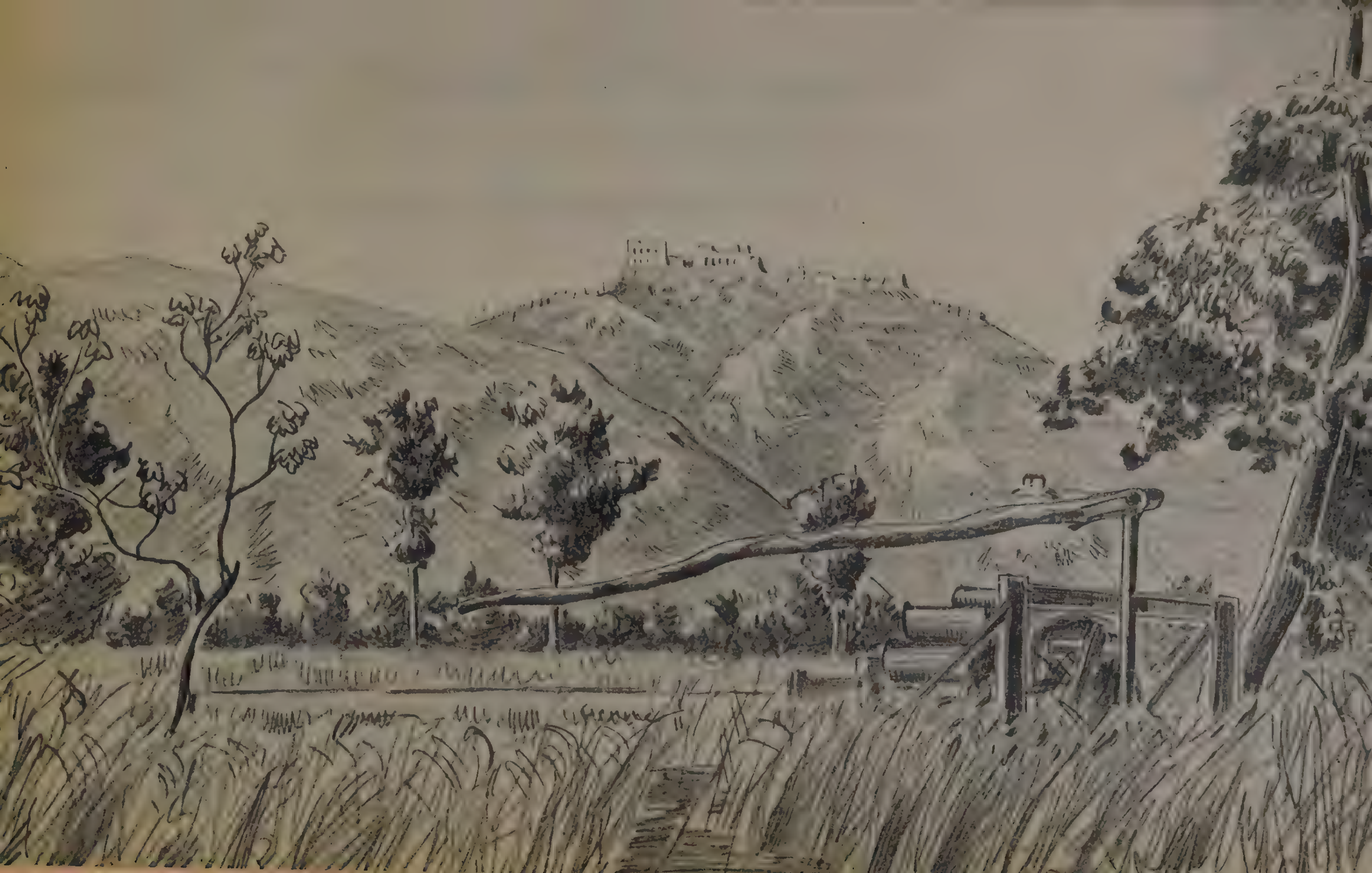
BELOW

MONTE TROCCHIO

12 Regiment's gun position before the Cassino battle opened. Only here among the ruins could they find cover from view by the Monastery's observation post. The village was Santa Lucia—not the one in the song!

(Drawn by Capt. V. C. Robertson)





foot in the Vichy camp. Thus it was even envisaged that such British forces as were to be engaged should go into battle in American uniform—an ill-conceived project, hastily abandoned; a decision which the course of events abundantly justified.

Most of the queries which had perplexed the Allied command had been answered before 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment made their entry to the North African campaign. Many misgivings had proved groundless. Spain did not renounce her neutrality. The Moors showed no sign of revolt. French resistance, bitter here and there for the first two days of the landing (8-10 November 1942), had ceased under Darlan's orders.

More vital, more propitious to the Allied fortunes, was the realisation that the veil of secrecy, which from the beginning had surrounded the planning of Torch, had been entirely and triumphantly successful. Whatever the Axis knew or suspected, they had no inkling of the Allied armada's destination until it had struck, and three ports were in the invaders' hands. Only as General Kenneth Anderson's miscellaneous collection of brigades and units, optimistically designated First Army, thrust eastward from Algiers, capturing the ports of Bougie, Bone and Djidjelli, did the Germans awaken to the threat, and begin to pour reinforcements across the short sea passage to Tunis.

BELOW

Monte Cassino—peace after the storm. Looking back at the ruined monastery after its capture in May 1944.

(Drawn by Capt. V. C. Robertson)

3. BLADE FORCE

October—December 1942

As they steamed across the Bay of Biscay, a jump ahead of the rest of the Regiment, C Battery learned officially for the first time their destination—Algiers—and their task. They were to form part of an armoured group which included 17/21 Lancers, a company of 10 Rifle Brigade and a troop of 72 Anti-Tank Regiment. The Group, led by Colonel R. A. Hull, would be under command of 78 Division; and as the emblem of 78 Division was a battleaxe so this portion of it, the first to come into action, would be known as Blade Force.

Haste was the motto. General Anderson, not yet reinforced by the Americans (a tardiness which evoked pungent comment when, a fortnight later, General Eisenhower transferred his headquarters from Gibraltar to Algiers) needed every man he could get if his thrust to Tunis was to succeed. One troop of C Battery were still not disembarked—despite strenuous efforts by Major Grose to supplement the port's effete unloading tackle—when the Force moved, on 16 November, inland over the mountains to Tablat, their tanks borne on transporters; pressing on next day 100 miles westward to Mansoura. Dividing here into fast and slow columns, the Force were able on 18 November to get 150 miles forward, harbouring near Constantine.

Weather abruptly changed as they wound through the eastward Atlas mountains. Dispatch riders, who had picked sunkissed oranges in the Algiers groves two days before, now found their eyelashes fringed with frost. An unfortunate accident on the journey caused the Battery's first casualty when a water-cart overturned, so injuring Gunner G. P. Bright that he died shortly afterwards in hospital.

Another 130-mile journey brought the column on 19 November to Souk Ahras, due south of Bone. Next morning, setting out eastwards for Souk el Arba, they were diverted south-west towards Teboursouk, where on General Anderson's right the Free French —who had thrown in their lot with the Allied cause but were ill-equipped for an encounter with German armour—seemed to be facing a tentative enemy thrust.

Here W Troop came into action, moving forward by evening—in touch with the Rifle Brigade company—to Testour. From Captain Lincoln's O.P. in the church tower the Troop had their first glimpse of enemy activity in the shape of a Stuka raid on the village. It caused no casualties; and a light attack by the Germans on the Anti-Tank Troop's forward position at Sloughia also came to nothing.

Without having fired a round, W Troop were moved back 30 odd miles to Le Kef, then north again to Souk el Arba, where X Troop joined to make the Battery complete. Enemy aircraft were by now beginning to harass the Force, but the Battery suffered no losses. There was an unexpected interlude when the Battery Commander's R.A.F. brother-in-law appeared out of the sky, and offered to fly one letter per man to Gibraltar next day—the troops' first chance of writing home.

The advance on 24 November was marked by the Battery's first battle casualty, when Major Grose got a slight leg wound as his vehicle was machine-gunned by enemy aircraft. Next day, as the wheels took the coastward road towards Sidi Nisr and Mateur, with the Crusaders and Valentines of 17/21 Lancers moving across country on the right, enemy air attacks grew fiercer, and that afternoon the first man of 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment to fall in action, Lance-Bombardier J. C. Keddie, was killed and two others wounded when eight J.U. 88s dived on the column.

Towards the evening of 25 November C Battery fired their first rounds in action. Two hill farms, manned by Italians with a stiffening of Germans, barred the approach at the T roads south of Mateur. Captain Lincoln put down several hundred rounds in support of the Rifle Brigade, who cleared the farms and took 200 Italian prisoners; but not without loss.

For nearly a week the Force pressed on towards Tunis, suffering fairly severe attrition among their vehicles from air attack; though Allied aircraft, overcoming superhuman difficulties in the way of bogged airfields, were beginning to make their presence felt. Flashes showed where their bombs were pounding Mateur, and W Troop were encouraged to see two J.U. 88s brought down by anti-aircraft fire.

Authentic news of the enemy was virtually nil. From the east, where light American tanks were now in action; from the north, where 17/21 Lancers, with the Battery in support, made a reconnaissance in force; then from the south, where German armour was threatening the Battery's rear, came reports of enemy tanks, calling for fitful excursions in several directions. The only certain thing was the unceasing attention of hostile aircraft, and on 30 November the divebombing of battery and wagon lines by two Spitfires, possibly captured machines flown by Germans, killed three men.

On 1 December, however, the Battery were in contact with the enemy in real earnest. South of Chouigi the Rifle Brigade company, reduced by their casualties around Mateur to not much more than a platoon, were watching the northward roads when enemy tanks and infantry-carrying vehicles were seen bearing down on the Force from the north-west. 17/21 Lancers' tanks on the left, American Honeys on the right, engaged them, coming in for heavy attack from the enemy's supporting aircraft.

For three hours Major Grose, directing the Battery's fire from a well-chosen viewpoint, gave the armour vigorous and successful support, causing the enemy considerable casualties. His stout and aggressive conduct of the Battery throughout the action, towards the end of which he was badly wounded, won him the Military Cross.

Nevertheless, it was obvious that Allied troops were far too thin on the ground to hold their advanced positions against any strong counterblow such as the German armour was now capable of giving. A concentration of the Force was ordered around a hastily formed strongpoint at Tebourba, where a stocktaking revealed that 17/21 Lancers were down to a handful of tanks, while the Rifle Brigade company could muster only one-quarter of their original strength and the Battery, with no ammunition replacements in sight, had only 20 rounds left per gun.

The swift dash for Tunis, chief aim of the North African landing, had failed. Advancing without hesitation 350 miles, well though he knew the paucity of his forces and the precariousness of the supply organisation behind him, General Anderson had been brought to a standstill within 20 miles of his objective.

What one American writer[1] calls the trans-Atlantic essay contest had resulted in tens of thousands of U.S. troops kicking their heels at various points along 1000 miles of single-track railway, guarding against anticipated perils which did not in fact arise. They could neither be brought to the front as reinforcements, nor supplied, over the undeveloped lines of communication, if they had been got there.

Accurately the planners had foretold that, if Tunis could be seized within 28 days of the first landing, the war in North Africa would be brought to a close. Tunis was *not* seized. The Germans were given just the breathing-space they needed to bring in substantial reinforcements. The job had to be begun over again.

On the evening of 2 December, after a few rounds fired in support of the East Surreys, who were facing the threatened attack from the south, Blade Force—what was left of them—were withdrawn to Oued Zarga. Here C Battery were visited by Lieut.-Colonel Mansell with the good news that the rest of the Regiment, all safely ashore, were now concentrated only a few miles back. By dawn, however, C Battery returned to the precarious front south of Mateur, where a Parachute Regiment and 2 Lancashire Fusiliers were still hanging on to farms they had captured in Blade Force's first battle.

The shape of things to come was revealed when orders were received to reconnoitre a stop line north-east of Beja. "Not anticipated that we will use it", noted the Battery Commander in his war diary; but in fact it proved to be the line which General Anderson's Army was to hold throughout the winter. Within a week Blade Force had finished their career. Orders came for a retirement to a concentration area at Teboursouk, where the Force would be reabsorbed into 6 Armoured Division.

One brisk engagement took place on the eve of this move. Mortar fire from the front line signalled a fresh German attack and X Troop, with Captain Hunt in command, deployed to meet it. He and Captain Lincoln soon found themselves in a general melée, in the course of which Captain Hunt's valise fell into enemy hands and he himself came under fire from a German who was using it as cover. The Troop's reply was of such vigour, however, that at one stage the Lancashire Fusiliers, who thought they now had the situation in hand, asked Captain Hunt to ease up so that the enemy could come closer and give the infantry a shot at them.

So mixed was the engagement that B.S.M. Pearston, bringing up ammunition from A Echelon to the Troop, found to his cost that an enemy machine-gun was in action between the gun position and Force Headquarters. It opened up on his lorry, killing Gunner J. H. Newton and fatally wounding Gunner E. Miles. 1 Parachute Battalion dealt with that machine-gun later.

By now heavy rains had added one more to the handicaps under which General Anderson's Army laboured, and given the troops their first experience of North African mud. It was not like English mud. Vehicles did not sink deep into it; they slid. Ground became so slippery that vehicles other than those with four-wheel drive—of which a R.H.A. regiment had none, except the gun-towing "quads"—could not operate off the road. As Blade Force's last action was being fought, the Battery's guns had to be moved out of their covered position beside a tree-lined river, lest a little later it should prove impossible to shift them at all. It was only a move of 500 yards; but it took each troop in turn five hours to accomplish.

This was Colonel Hull's final order to Blade Force on 13 December 1942:

"Blade did the job it was ordered to do and accounted for approximately 42 enemy aircraft, 25 enemy armoured fighting vehicles and possibly several more, and 450 men, including prisoners. Apart from losses of vehicles by enemy action, the small number that broke down mechanically, in spite of forced marches and lack of time for maintenance, reflects very favourably on the standard of care and maintenance by drivers."

Though the swift capture of Tunis was only a might-have-been, the aggressive spirit with which the Force had been handled by General Anderson and Colonel Hull, their own commander, had reaped far better results than might have been foreseen.

The original plan was to secure Bone and concentrate there with 6 Armoured Division. Actually, at Teboursouk, the Force were 100 miles east of this objective. Though Tunis had eluded their grasp, they had bottled up the Germans in the north-west corner of Tunisia and severely curtailed forays which might have disrupted the ultimate pincer advance of First and 8 Armies.

NOTE TO CHAPTER THREE

[1] "Three Years with Eisenhower," Captain H. C. Butcher, 1946.

4. IT'S ALL BEEN CHANGED

The Division are harbouring here, I think;
I heard it on the R.T. link.
The lines are laid,
The latrines arranged—
But haven't you heard?
It's all been changed.

Mailed Fist Song-Book.

Meantime the rest of the Regiment had disembarked, on 22 November, at Algiers. "Rather an anti-climax in its way", commented Captain M. F. Gilbert, writing a few days later. "We had fully imagined we might have to make an opposed landing, fighting our way in with our rifles above our heads, waist-deep in the surf."

Instead, they plodded their way through the jostling quayside crowds—"the scene was that of an unusually disorganised Bank Holiday"—to the Jardin d'Essai. "I do not suppose First Army staff were very clever in those days, but on this occasion they surpassed themselves. Ignoring the obvious solution of taking over a few blocks of flats (that was to be left to the initiative of the troops themselves after three rainsoaked days) they decided that we should all camp out in the Public Gardens. These were filled with rare and exotic plants and trees (which afforded adequate but rather smoky firewood to the troops) and even rarer and more exotic statues of deities, one of which, I remember, presided over the officers' latrine."

Three air-raid warnings complicated the task of sorting out and retrieving baggage; each provoking a deafening uproar from Oerlikons, multiple pom-poms, the new hush-hush rocket projectiles, heavy and light ack-ack and even Brens; till a sardonic voice over the inter-com. of the nearest ship was heard asking what the * * * * * * they thought they were firing at; followed by "an abrupt silence as terrifying as the noise had been".

A better camp was found at the Polygone; but almost immediately the Battery were moved by sea eastwards to Bone. By 2 December—after a voyage marked by a near miss from two torpedoes—men and vehicles were reunited and set out on a forced night march (enemy aircraft made daytime moves unhealthy) to Souk el Khemis. It was a march to dwell in the memory; along roads more suited to donkey traffic than military vehicles; tracks edged with sheer precipices that wound round breathtaking hairpin bends down into steep valleys, up inclines of staggering steepness. So on to Beja.

Within ten days they had been allotted places—very temporary places—in the line—a very vague line—with which General Anderson was endeavouring to protect his southern flank from threats the weight of which he had little means of assessing.

D Battery, under command of 16/5 Lancers, were to harbour in Oued Zarga area as a reserve. T Troop of F Battery were sent to cover Testour. Regimental H.Q. and V Troop of F Battery were sited three miles north-east of Teboursouk, the Troop being at one hour's notice in case of enemy tank activity towards Medjez el Bab, where 1 Guards Brigade stood ready to defend the village (which in fact they did. It remained throughout the campaign in British hands).

Two fixed patrols were established, under 6 Armoured Division orders. Captain M. J. V. Perry of F Battery was posted as artillery adviser to the post at Bou Arada. Y Troop of D Battery were ordered to join, at El Aroussa, a standing patrol of a company, 1 London Irish Rifles, known as Nick Force from its C.O., Major Nicholson of 16/5 Lancers. V Troop then moved to the green plain of Goubellat with half a squadron of 16/5 Lancers, forming Taylor Force.

One Battery were required to rendezvous at Beja, and there Major Causton assembled, on 11 December, Z Troop of D Battery and T Troop of F Battery, coming under command of Lieut.-Colonel T. C. Usher of 78 Division—an old comrade of the Regiment, who had commanded C Battery for more than a year in their East Anglian days.[1]

Thus dispersed, C Battery found the Regiment when they rejoined.

From that moment until the end of February 1943 the Regiment manœuvred in disconnected sub-units around an area of 6000 square miles, unaware from day to day where, in a two-month game of musical chairs, they might find themselves on the morrow, nor what unforeseen task they might have to face.

In so far as it concerned the British side of Torch, such fragmentation of formations was the inevitable result of the basic plan. This aimed at building up an effective Army by April/May 1943—which was in fact achieved; but it involved including in the early convoys a substantial proportion of Base and Lines of Communication troops. This situation continued from mid-January until early March, by which time 46 Division, 1 Division and 4 Division had arrived.

Their much shorter reinforcement route allowed the Germans to build up a superiority in aircraft and tanks. Thus in the meantime they held the initiative—a fact which imposed a severe strain on General Anderson's fighting troops.

It is hardly to be wondered at that the rank and file, not being fully "in the picture", should have developed, during these trying days, a certain cynicism: a certain misgiving whether Higher Authority knew what they—or the enemy—were up to. It was expressed in what became a catch phrase as sub-units, in response to ever-varying orders, circled round Tunisia like a dog reconnoitring a strange bed: "Haven't you heard? It's all been changed".

NOTE TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1] Lieut.-Colonel Usher was awarded the D.S.O. for his service in North Africa.

5. PLUMBERS' MATES

December 1942

Three fingers of the Maritime Atlas stretch eastwards as if clutching unavailingly towards the Gulf of Tunis. Weather of unusual vileness and paucity of troops had at last frustrated General Anderson's bold push towards Tunis. Past the famous Longstop Hill, Blade Force had swept as far as Tebourba and even Djedeida—only 20 miles from their goal.

In fierce counter-attacks the Germans had blunted this spearhead. Longstop was taken; twice retaken by the Guards, twice lost again by its slender American garrison. Then mud, turning each airfield into a morass, bogging down tanks and men, had brought the advance to a halt. It was across the tips of the Atlas foothills, up hill and down dale, that the Commander, First Army, was forced to site what was euphemistically called his Winter Line.

It stretched roughly north to south for some 150 miles—a shallow arc bent eastwards. Supreme Headquarters at Algiers, ever looking over their shoulders at the swaying, unpredictable currents of French and Moroccan politics, had neither the time nor the experience to furnish General Anderson with the intelligence as to enemy strategy an army commander can normally expect.

His meagre air forces, handicapped by lack of practicable landing grounds, could help him little in this respect. Chief reliance was perforce placed on the reconnoitring initiative of the little detachments dotted along the "line".

Tactical precepts as to the handling of armour and artillery were temporarily disregarded. Such armoured regiments as were available had to be used scouting and skirmishing in wasteful penny packets. Their artillery, their normal partners in tank warfare, rushed up and down the so-called "line" in detached batteries and troops, supporting improvised forces against unexpected attacks.

Throughout the winter this was the role of 12 Regiment, who well lived up to the Royal Artillery's motto *Ubique*. As they roved Tunisia "stopping holes", they often found themselves in the good company of the Guards Brigade; so often that, as the Guards earned the First Army nickname of "the Plumbers", 12 Regiment became known as "the Plumbers' Mates".

Cynical though they may have felt about their ever-changing orders, the sub-units of 12 Regiment responded to them with alacrity, performing their tasks with initiative and verve. Each battery, each troop, had their own story of adventures.

They began with a minor disaster. As V Troop moved down the road to Goubellat shortly after daybreak on 12 December four enemy aircraft—J.U. 88s—circled over the column, then swooped down, bombing and machine-gunning. In a matter of moments three quads, three trucks and three ammunition trailers had been put out of action—astonishingly, with no casualties to personnel.

Again at midday the Troop were attacked. By early afternoon came the first of the orders and counter-orders which were to become a feature of this phase of the campaign. Captain Bagnall was to bring his Troop back forthwith to Teboursouk. Fortunately wiser counsels prevailed: fresh orders were sent for the move to be postponed until after dark. Even so, the Troop were again attacked, another quad being destroyed—once more without casualties.

Meanwhile Y Troop of D Battery had been sent to El Aroussa, to join Nick Force. In Victor Perry, this extemporised formation had, for their C.R.A., a man who was described as the best natural soldier the Regiment had produced; a man of quick and ingenious mind whose solutions to impromptu problems had many a time, in training, delighted his contemporaries.

With the Troop in action at Bou Arada he found himself in a curious and tantalising situation. Across a broad plain, fringed by the foothills of two of the Atlas fingers, Nick Force faced the enemy ensconced among the opposite hills of Pont du Fahs. Both sides had excellent observation. Both sides—from information gleaned from itinerant Arabs—imagined that they knew to a pin-point the location of their opponents. But both sides were out of range of each other. All the satisfaction the Troop could get was occasional sniping at German armoured cars as they darted across the plain.

For this dilemma, as ever, Perry had a quick solution: to take one 25-pounder by night some six miles into the enemy zone and shell, by prediction, their alleged headquarters. Had any such cloak and dagger enterprise been suggested at any other stage of the campaign no doubt it would have been promptly (and rightly) suppressed by Higher Command. But Higher Command was not there; and Y Troop, like Sir Richard Strachan at Walcheren, were "longing to be at 'em".

Sergeant Whitehouse of D sub-section was chosen. Stripping his quad of all impedimenta, including even the doors, he spent the preceding afternoon practising his detachment in quick turn rounds. On push bicycle Captain Gilbert, the Troop Commander, and Jack Remmington, his G.P.O., set out along the road across the plain, in full moonlight, to reconnoitre a gun position and proceeded to survey with reference to Milestone 10 kilometres from Pont du Fahs.

That night (13 December) the pirate crew set out, preceded by a light armoured car, and dropping two covering parties along the road. The gun trundled into position with noise enough to wake the German commander in his bed; but no sound came from across the plain. Laying on the tail light of the quad (which was already discreetly pointing for home) it opened up. At round 20 the armoured car sent up a green Very light, indicating the approach of interference (not serious interference: a red light was reserved for that); so after loosing off four more rounds the gun trundled home.

The adventure worked like a charm. Only one vehicle gave trouble—the spare quad, which the armoured car took in tow. The "Pont du Fahs Gallop", as it thereafter became known in the Troop annals, did not perhaps materially affect the outcome of the war, but it put Y Troop on their toes for ever after as evidence that, from the word Go, they had the true offensive spirit.

A few more games of "General Post" and the Regiment found themselves more or less concentrated at the easternmost edge of the bulge to the south of General Anderson's line, in the area Testour-Sloughia, just south of Medjez. Hope was by no means abandoned of a final Christmas push to drive the enemy out of Tunis; and the various small forces distributed along the front—gunners, armour and infantry—busied themselves in probes to see what they could add to the sparse information collected by Army Headquarters.

One such foray cost the Regiment their Commanding Officer, when Lieut.-Colonel Mansell's scout car went up on a British mine while he was reconnoitring a gun area for the proposed Christmas attack. Badly wounded in the leg, he was evacuated eventually to England. It was a bitter disappointment to this capable officer who, only the day before, had given orders, for the first time overseas, to the Regiment assembled complete under his command.

Into his place stepped the leader who was destined to command the Regiment throughout the rest of their war service, Major John Barstow. Major Adam Block came to take over Second-in-Command—an experienced regular officer who had been Brigade Major, R.A., 6 Armoured Division, for more than two years; hitherto a good friend and now an invaluable asset to the Regiment. Major J. D. C. Ellison was posted to H.Q.R.A. as Brigade Major, being succeeded as F Battery Commander by Major Victor Perry.

During the period of reconnaissance the rains which, starting early in December, had greatly hampered movement, became a continuous downpour. The Christmas thrust to Tunis, ardently desired by the Allied Commander, had to be postponed; and General Eisenhower came up to see why.

In pouring rain he was conducted through deep mud to General Allfrey's V Corps Headquarters at Souk El Khemis, and there he saw why. Anxious to leave no wheel unturned—or track, either—General Anderson had caused trials to be made with every type of vehicle to see if they *could* be manœuvred in action over, or through, the slimy mud which now covered not only the battle area but all the men in it.

("You just can't get away from it", wrote Lieut. J. M. Austin-Smith in a letter home. "I am literally covered from head to foot in mud. Everything one touches is mud, including knife and fork, the driving wheel, the cooker, everything.")

"We went out personally to inspect the countryside over which the troops would have to advance", says General Eisenhower in his book *Crusade in Europe*, "and while doing so I observed an incident which, as much as anything else, I think, convinced me of the hopelessness of an attack.

"About 30 feet off the road, in a field that appeared to be covered with winter wheat, a motor cycle had become stuck in the mud. Four soldiers were struggling to extricate it but in spite of their most strenuous efforts succeeded only in getting themselves mired into the sticky clay. They finally had to give up the attempt and left the motor-cycle more deeply bogged down than when they started."

So—while General Eisenhower was speeding back to Algiers, weighing the fresh problems which the assassination of Admiral Darlan had that day thrust upon him—the Regiment spent Christmas 1942 in peace, albeit in discomfort. X Troop were still in action. Their Christmas dinner was held beneath tarpaulins. Their table of "compo" ration boxes, spread with a blanket, was decked with the colourful packets of V book matches which formed part of this comprehensive ration, and a glass dish of issue chocolate, broken into small squares. Elsewhere, however, more festive conditions prevailed.

War, according to some, is organised slaughter. Forgetting war for a time, D Battery had a bout of disorganised slaughter, as amid blood and tears (of laughter) they immolated, under the inexpert leadership of Lieut. Mike Austin-Smith, a locally-bought turkey and a brace of pigs; cooking them by methods which must have made Mrs. Beeton turn in her grave.

6. "CRASHING FROM THE HILLS"[1]

January 1943

Reconnaissances were resumed in the New Year; and the Regiment took part in a double tank sweep, aimed at probing the enemy's forward line opposite Amphitheatre Ridge, a feature south-east of Medjez. 16/5 Lancers, with the Regiment in support, were to perform the sweep in company with the Lothians and Border Horse; swinging out from behind the Ridge, making a half circle in No Man's Land and returning to the shelter of the Ridge.

Preparations for this manœuvre cost the Regiment one of its most valued officers. Selecting an observation post on 1 January, the eve of the operation, Captain M. F. Gilbert ran his truck over a German mine with the usual result. There were no casualties, however, and Captain Gilbert, with Gunner Northwood, returned for another truck to salvage his own. They were still at it when darkness fell, and an enemy patrol, emerging from a neighbouring farm, captured the pair of them.[2]

What happened at Amphitheatre Ridge can best be summed up in the words of Major Rae: "Never was so much support given by so many to so few for so little." B Squadron 16/5 Lancers made their sweep, accompanied by Major Rae and Captain Lincoln in their Crusader O.P.s, while the C.O., Captain Douglas Hughes and Captain Hunt kept watch from static O.P.s on high ground. No enemy were seen. The Regiment fired many rounds of H.E.

The Squadron were shelled and had to leave several tanks, including the Regiment's two Crusaders, disabled on the plain. Attempts by night to recover them were only partially successful, though a week later Lieut. T. N. W. Lacey and C Battery's fitter, Sergeant Marchant, by a plucky effort in broad daylight under light shell fire, did manage to bring back one of the O.P. tanks.

The next hole to be plugged was some 25 miles to the south, where a cluster of small eminences, Two Tree Hill and Points 279 and 286, rounded off the southern edge of the Goubellat Plain. It was typical of the rather haphazard methods by which the

"Winter Line" was held, that these obvious infantry features had not been secured. The fact is, no infantry were available to hold them except French irregulars, too ill-equipped, yet, to face any considerable threat.

When F Battery were first despatched to the area there was no contact with the enemy, and they had reconnoitred an observation post, in case action developed, on Two Tree Hill. Six days later it was obvious that the enemy were ensconced there, and V Troop, moving north from Bou Arada, came in for some shelling. D Battery were brought down in support and on 10 January the first of several stiff engagements in this area began with an attack on the hill by a company of 10 Rifle Brigade and half a squadron of 17/21 Lancers.

Numerous targets were engaged by the Batteries but the attack did not succeed. Captain Kirk of D Battery, going forward to tackle an awkward machine-gun, had his truck hit and the wireless operator, Gunner R. W. F. Sheppard, killed. All the attackers could do was to dig in along the eminence known as Grandstand Ridge.

They tried again and again, but were driven back by heavy mortar fire, though Captain Cecil Middleton, bringing down a concentration on a farm behind Two Tree Hill, caused a good deal of confusion and casualties among enemy vehicles. 6 Inniskilling Fusiliers, relieving the Rifle Brigade, were about to deliver a dawn attack on 13 January when a midnight enemy patrol fell upon T Troop, capturing a Light Anti-Aircraft detachment and one man of the Troop who, however, escaped an hour later.

The attack went in, nevertheless, forward observing officers walking with the leading companies—a bold idea but, as it turned out, not an efficient one. They could see little of the machine-guns and mortars which were harassing the infantry. One, Lieut. G. W. M. Swallow, was lost. Hit by mortar fire, he was last seen, badly wounded, beside a hillside farm. Unavailing search for his grave was made after the campaign ended.

OPPOSITE

12 REGIMENT

ABOVE, LEFT: *Major J. D. C. Ellison(k), B.C. F Battery September-December 1942, 2nd-in-C. December 1942.* RIGHT: *Major D. E. Hughes, B.C. F Battery April-July 1943, D Battery July 1943-October 1945.*

13 REGIMENT

BELOW, LEFT: *Major P. Kinnersley, B.C. H Battery 1945.* RIGHT: *Major the O'Grady, B.C. I Battery February 1944-July 1945.* CENTRE: *Major R. Gaunt, B.C. G Battery August 1943-October 1945.*

Once again the attack failed and under the Regiment's smoke screen the Inniskillings withdrew with many casualties. There was an awkward moment for Captain Douglas Hughes as he directed the screen from his Crusader. He had brought his tank to a halt when suddenly it ran downhill out of control for 200 yards, tearing apart the communication wire. Lance-Sergeant D. L. Hodson and his signallers made a quick job, in not too healthy circumstances, of repairing the wire; but the tank was in too exposed a position to be recovered, and when the action concluded it had to be left where it lay.

By now this hill, which nobody had thought much about a fortnight before, had become a vital objective. Two battalions, two field regiments and some medium guns were allotted for its capture, but on the eve of the planned assault the enemy struck.

Captain Hughes, from his slit trench in the infantry front line, saw a battalion of Germans pressing forward and brought first his Battery's, then the Regiment's fire down on them. Undeterred they came on, till they were within 400 yards of the O.P., which Captain Hughes was now defending with his rifle. He was just able to withdraw in time, joining the C.O. and the battalion commander in a rocky crevice, from which he continued to direct D Battery's fire until the advancing enemy were within 800 yards of the guns.

Meanwhile, into the valley from Pont du Fahs rolled 30 enemy tanks to their aid. This was a target after the heart of Brigadier Lyon-Smith, C.R.A. of 6 Armoured Division, and he gave his gunners the first U shoot of the campaign. One German tank did penetrate to D Battery lines, writing off a quad at point-blank range—its crew had fortunately dived for cover; but by now the pace had become too hot, and the whole attack petered out, with 13 enemy tanks and many dead infantry strewn over the plain.

It was the Regiment's first encounter with a really strong enemy force. They had fired 300 rounds per gun during the day and were in high feather, though they had lost two valuable men: Lance-Sergeant Hodson, killed in reconnoitring a new observation post, and Battery Sergeant Major R. Mackenzie of X Troop,

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OPPOSITE

13 Regiment

ABOVE: *The C.O.'s tank leads the Regiment ashore at Courseulles.*

BELOW: "*Definitely not tank country.*" *A typical glimpse of the Bocage.*

hit by a shell which landed almost on top of the command post.

Nettled by their reverse, the Germans sent over Stukas next morning in two forays. The first, heavily bombing the Regimental Echelon, caused some casualties. Gunner D. Cooper, Lance-Bombardier A. Williams and Gunner S. Rimmer of C Battery were killed; six others wounded. The second raid, however, was so warmly received with ack-ack fire that it swung away with no damage done.

Attention now turned to the two subsidiary hills, Points 286 and 279, which were attacked with swaying fortunes: taken by the London Irish; retaken in a moonlight assault by German tanks and infantry, which captured virtually every one of the defenders—including Lieut. A. P. Davies,[3] the forward observing officer, and Gunner R. Marriott; then once again abandoned by the enemy.

Close support of infantry, by now becoming a normal routine, brought new problems for the signallers. They rose to the occasion splendidly, and nowhere more conspicuously than during these struggles for the two nameless hillocks. Captain Hunt, doing F.O.O. with the London Irish, had as assistant Lance-Bombardier R. H. Newell. His coolness in keeping the line open despite heavy shell and small-arms fire was an inspiration to his band of signallers, and the Military Medal awarded to him for this action may be considered a tribute to all of them.

Two tragic accidents added to the Regiment's casualty roll. Some Hawkins grenades exploded in a quad, killing two men of F Battery. The other mishap caused the Regiment an irreparable loss. "Stand to" had been ordered in F Battery Command Post. Major Perry, promoted to Battery Commander only a month before, was adjusting his equipment when by some mischance a grenade which he was carrying exploded, killing him instantly.

Throughout this week of fighting Lieut.-Colonel Barstow was in his element: with the battalion commander in the infantry attack; directing fire from the most forward positions; more than once controlling the guns of the entire force to break up successive waves of enemy infantry. His leadership secured for his Regiment their first major success and earned him the award of the D.S.O.

The fight for the hilltops had barely died down when there was a call from further south. D Battery were despatched to answer it, followed a night later—movement was only feasible by night—by F Battery and Regimental H.Q. As they approached Robaa, crowds of Frenchmen heading west along the roads told clearly that an armoured punch from Pont du Fahs had thrown the lightly-armed French off balance.

Major Eric Causton ordered his guns into an anti-tank position and, joined next day by a squadron of 17/21 Lancers, advanced towards Robaa where the Lancers' tanks, after a reconnaissance in force, found no sign of the enemy. However, Higher Authority was convinced of the reality of the threat, and evening brought H.Q. 36 Brigade, with the Royal West Kents and the Buffs,[4] to occupy a position astride the road from Robaa to Pont du Fahs.

On 31 January the forecast proved amply justified. In the inky darkness before dawn Captain Douglas Hughes, forward with D Company of the Buffs, heard the sound, distant but unmistakable, of tank engines. At 0730, in the half light, he discerned, nosing over the crest in front, the enormous hull of a tank more formidable than any the Regiment had yet seen—the Tiger tank, the Mark VI, with its huge gun protruding menacingly from the turret. Two Mark IVs followed.

In a moment he had D and F Batteries on the target; but their shelling had little effect on the tanks' advance. At the top of the rise they halted, slewing their guns to enfilade the forward infantry position, where Captain S. O. Edwards's troop of 72 Anti-Tank Regiment lay doggo.

It had been his plan that the first wave of any tank attack that might come should be allowed to pass his position and be dealt with by Lieut. Heslop's troop, sited in a wood 500 yards further back, on the other side of the road; while he would take on the second tank wave which was bound to follow. This enfilade fire, however, was too much to bear; and anyhow the tanks shewed no sign of coming on. Edwards's Troop let fly with their 6-pounders. Heslop's joined in.

In two minutes the two Mark IVs were ablaze, while the Tiger, holed in two places and with a track blown off, seemed to have no further interest in the proceedings. Bypassing these three, another Tiger, followed by two more Mark IVs, made for the wood where the Buffs' other company and Heslop's Troop awaited them. It was an anxious moment for the foremost Buffs to see their position passed and the forward guns silent, even though they knew what was afoot. Misgivings were dispelled when a storm of 6-pounder shells fell on the tanks from the wood and all three were brewed up.

Meanwhile Captain Douglas Hughes had lifted D and F Batteries' fire to take on the formidable force of which these tanks were the forerunners—a score more tanks, a great assembly of armoured half-tracks and, in the distance, a conglomeration of 3-tonners. Infantry were soon dismounting from the half-tracks to deploy right and left of the road. Dive-bombers swooped on the guns and sprayed them with machine-gun fire, but in no wise impaired the accuracy of their shooting.

Throughout the day observation posts could only be kept going by sheer determination. Captain Hughes at one time was under fire from front, side and rear. The enemy got a machine-gun to within 200 yards of him; but he kept shooting. Captain Richard Young, to get to his post, had to take his carrier through the blazing German tanks and across one of our own minefields, with tanks shooting at him from 300 yards.

The Germans managed to bring their mortars within range of V Troop, which lost eight men, including—wounded—Lieut. Michael Scott, the Troop Leader. As dusk fell the enemy still had enough fight in them to work their way round the right flank, giving the Buffs' forward company a restless night with snipers in front and behind, until they were ferreted out at dawn.

Ammunition expenditure was enormous—3600 rounds, all observed shooting, in a few hours. The result was gratifying: a bag of six half-tracks, one Mark III tank and a considerable number (uncountable, of course) of German infantry.

While this fighting was in progress, the Germans had a defence cordon round their rearmost Tiger. They were as keen to prevent inspection of their new weapon as the British Higher Command were keen to examine it. At dark they managed to get it away. The foremost Tiger, however, remained in British hands. For two days efforts were made to drag it back.

When at last they succeeded, it became a magnet for generals. No less an expert than Sir Giffard Martel, Commander of the Royal Armoured Corps, came to inspect it. Proud though they were of their trophy, the gunners somewhat deprecated the clusters of "tourists" whom it drew, for each fresh arrival was the signal for a gratuitous bout of shelling from the enemy.

It was never officially established, but the gunners may well claim a distinguished scalp in that engagement: for the B.B.C. announced later that Lieut.-General Fischer, commanding 10 Panzer Division, had been killed on that date "in a tank skirmish".

Was he in one of those Tigers—possibly in the second one—"shewing the boys how easy it all was?"

Away to the right F Battery, under their new commander Major Cecil Middleton, came in for so sharp an infantry attack that for a while Lieut. Greest found himself a prisoner. A couple of Germans, escorting some disarmed prisoners of the Royal West Kent, walked into T Troop's position and held him up. His captivity did not last long. There was a scuffle, and the tables were turned. Greest pushed one of his escorts over the cliff. The West Kents were released and their remaining escort disarmed and put "in the bag".

An American battalion which had been brought up to reinforce 36 Brigade found themselves in an awkward predicament. They had one company sited rather far forward. It came in for a stiff attack from two German battalions and suffered heavy casualties from machine-gun and mortar fire. Captain Tom Cracknell of F Battery and Lieut. G. N. Collings of D were up with them in O.P.s when they began to waver. Collings had his signaller wounded, and sent him back; then was himself wounded. (He was ultimately taken prisoner.) Having searched for him in vain, Cracknell turned his attention to rallying the American company, of which, for the moment, he took command.

He received high praise from the battalion commander and his steadiness in a situation of very great peril earned him the American Silver Star and the Military Cross.

There followed several days of hard artillery fighting and aggressive patrolling by the infantry. 1 Guards Brigade came to reinforce 36 Brigade, and for several weeks 12 Regiment resumed their happy partnership with 3 Grenadier and 2 Coldstream Guards, and later 3 Welsh Guards.

How close this partnership was may be gauged from a letter written, towards its end, by the Brigade Commander to the C.R.A. 6 Armoured Division, Brigadier T. Lyon-Smith.

"My dear Tiger,

I write to you a line of farewell, as I expect to leave for England by air to-morrow. I was so sorry to miss saying good-bye to you personally, Bill Bedford,[5] John Barstow, Adam[6] and to my many other friends, but I hope you will do so for me—and wish them all good fortune and good luck.

It was grand to work with you all, and no one has ever received better support than my Brigade from you.

The very best of good fortune and luck to you personally and all gunners in 6 Armd.

Yours ever,

Vincent Copland-Griffiths."

C Battery were released from the Bou Arada area and for a time the whole Regiment were in action together. Lieut.-Colonel Barstow, as reinforcements came to stiffen the position, found himself C.R.A. of a force of 90 guns, some of which were French. Two months of constant movement and fairly constant action had brought 12 Regiment to a high pitch of efficiency, mobility and confidence. Within a week these were to be sternly tested.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

[1] Zeph. 1. 10.

[2] Captain Gilbert made a fine escape from North Italy—for which he was mentioned in despatches—and rejoined the Regiment in time for the Italian campaign (see page 221).

[3] Lieut. Davies, setting out for freedom from Campo 49 near Parma—where he was fellow-prisoner with Captain Gilbert (see page 221)—had the bad luck to be wounded and recaptured, after 40 days' walking, almost within sight of the British line south of the Sangro. He was taken to Germany, again escaped, was retaken in Prague, and was finally released on the collapse of Germany in the spring of 1945.

[4] Commanded—in his first battle—by Lieut.-Colonel A. D. McKechnie, late H.A.C. Infantry.

[5] Lieut.-Colonel W. J. R. Bedford, Commanding 152 Field Regiment (Ayrshire Yeomanry). Killed at Goubellat, April 1943.

[6] Major A. J. C. Block.

7. TWO BATTLE HONOURS

(SBIBA AND THALA)

16-25 *February* 1943

The causes which led up to the American disaster at Kasserine have been frankly acknowledged by the Allied Commander. He had set his heart on a non-stop drive to Tunis. Mud had thwarted him. Unwilling to accept a set-back in the first campaign he had commanded, he had deprecated the concentration of the Allied forces by a shortening of the winter line: had begun, indeed, building up an American II Corps in the south—Tebessa-Gafsa-Kasserine—with a view to an eastward dash to the coast to bar Rommel's retreat under the pressure of 8 Army.

The American troops and their commanders were unused, yet, to the tempo and strains of modern war. Till the eve of the disaster the three components—British, French and American—had been under separate command. Intelligence was faulty at both Allied Headquarters and Army levels.

A feint at Fondouk and Pichon was wrongly thought to be Rommel's main attack. His real thrust on 14 February 1943—an upward hook from Gafsa, a downward hook from Faid—swept the Americans aside so fiercely as to cause Captain Butcher, General Eisenhower's aide, to note the reverse in his diary as "one of the greatest defeats in our history".[1]

They had lost 117 tanks, more than 300 vehicles and some 48 guns. Their casualties were 192 killed, 2624 wounded, 2459 prisoners. Within four days their foremost troops had been forced back some 70 miles.

The Germans had driven through the Kasserine Pass, overrunning the important forward area of Thelepte and threatening even the vital communications centres of Tebessa, with its airfield, and Le Kef.

It was a situation calling for prompt action. This was supplied when, two days after the setback, 1 Guards Brigade and 12

Regiment were moved by night to Maktar and, before they had bedded down, on to Sbiba, to help stop the flood of vehicles heading towards Le Kef.

General Keightley was there in person, with Brigadier Copland-Griffiths, commanding 1 Guards Brigade; and for a while Lieut.-Colonel Barstow again found himself C.R.A., with every variety of artillery—light and heavy anti-aircraft, anti-tank, field—under his command. Their orders provided that infinitesimal makeweight of authority which can turn the balance between panic and steadiness.

A position was occupied—10 miles south of the peace-time-pretty little town of Sbiba—designed to block, or at least impede, advance up the wide valley. Flanking the southward road on either side, 3 Grenadier Guards and 2 Coldstream Guards, with C and D Batteries in support, awaited a column of 30 or 40 German tanks, backed by infantry-carrying vehicles, which emerged through the mist on 19 February.

Under shell fire from the batteries the enemy column quickly deployed. One by one the tanks withdrew, leaving seven wrecks. (Credit for destroying them was shared between the Regiment and an American battery of 155-mm., which had been brought up in support.)

The German infantry were on the verge of attacking when Major Causton ordered 30 rounds gunfire. The attack broke up without the infantry firing a shot.

There was another encounter with enemy tanks on 21 February. The North Irish Horse, armed with Churchills, the new British infantry tanks, speedier, more heavily armoured than their predecessors and carrying the long-desired 6-pounder gun, had arrived at the front that day. Two troops of these tanks, supporting a Coldstream Guards reconnaissance, mounted the Meftah Ridge, a feature in No Man's Land. Hidden from them, but not from the gunners, enemy tanks climbed the slope on the other side.

Holding their breath the Regimental O.P. officers watched, and betted which would first reach the summit; and laid on all they could in the way of artillery support to try and ensure that it should not be the Germans. In fact it was a dead heat. There followed a bout of confused fighting, with all guns blazing, and a mutual withdrawal. Three Churchills failed to return.

The Americans themselves, keenly sensitive about their reverse, were doing their utmost to retrieve it, and American gunners, in action on the left, were kept in touch with the Regiment by Major Adam Block until a shortening of the line was ordered, involving a withdrawal to Rohia. As far as their northward push was concerned—the threat to Sbiba—the Germans had definitely been held. They had shot their bolt.

Not so with the southern arm of their pincer movement, which threatened Thala.

While C and D Batteries were busy at Sbiba, F Battery had, four days earlier, been detached to join 26 Armoured Brigade. Twenty-five miles to the west, an American engineer battalion, holding the Kasserine Pass, had given way, sweeping back with them the small subsidiary force—a company of Rifle Brigade, a troop of tanks and a field battery—which had been rushed to their support. 26 Armoured Brigade less 16/5 Lancers were ordered to fight a delaying action 15 or 20 miles from Thala while, thus protected, a battalion of the Leicesters dug a defensive position on a ridge five miles south of the town.

At first light on the sunny morning of 20 February the action began. German infantry, well out of range, were seen getting out of their vehicles. Shortly after midday 20 or 30 tanks, with a few self-propelled guns, led the enemy infantry towards the Allied position. First to meet the shock were C Squadron Lothians and Border Horse. Their Valentines, outranged and outgunned, fought until all but one had been knocked out, the squadron leader, Major Beilby, walking from tank to tank until he was killed. Then the last Valentine, in death grips with a tank of thrice its gun power, joined its enemy in mutual destruction.

Throughout the day, with Brigadier Dunphie calmly erect in his scout car, directing the fight by wireless, the Lothians and Border Horse and 17/21 Lancers rivalled each other in gallantry of this sort until, having held up the enemy advance for the whole 24 hours allotted to them, they withdrew through the Leicesters' lines with barely enough tanks between them to make a squadron.

As the armour fell back so, troop by troop, F Battery conformed; firing steadily at what they could see—which, in the dust raised by the tracks and the smoke screens put up by successive squadrons as they withdrew, was precious little—or what they could guess.

While the exhausted cavalrymen, in leaguer, refuelled and licked their wounds, F Battery came into action 1500 yards in rear of the position the Leicesters had dug. Level with them, C

Company 10 Rifle Brigade, rejoicing at a momentary respite, were digging slit trenches. A tank trundled up in the darkness (there was no moon), demolishing the side of a trench a rifleman had almost completed. He stood to curse the driver. The reply was a revolver shot. Fifty yards on, the tank halted within 100 yards of the Battery position with four others behind it.

"Come out and surrender to the Panzers", said a voice in perfect English. "You are all finished."

A Bren carrier came up the road; stopped, all unsuspecting, beside the tank. It was immediately shot up, and in a moment the tanks were loosing off in all directions with their 75-mm. guns and machine-guns. Sounds of firing, flashes of Verey lights, small-arms fire in ragged streams came from the darkness beyond.

"It is impossible to estimate how long the stalemate lasted", wrote Major R. Fyffe, the Rifle Brigade company commander. "It seemed a century. It was perhaps 15 minutes. Suddenly it was broken by F Battery. Someone fired a Verey light. There was a flash from a 25-pounder . . ."

Sergeant T. B. Ainslie, No. 1 of T Troop's nearest gun, had spotted the tank as it halted, seemingly with some minor mechanical trouble. Tanks were still groping their way home from the battle; but Ainslie suspected this particular one. As he crept forward to reconnoitre, he heard German voices. Back in the gun position a quick plan was made: Captain John Pirie would fire a Verey light, Sergeant Ainslie would lay his gun on the tank, Lieut. John Bagnall, with a Bren, would prevent any German from shewing his head.

The first Verey light misfired. The second lit the tank in its flickering glow and a moment later Ainslie had scored a direct hit with his first shot, following it with another to knock out the second tank which had crept up behind. A third tank broke off from the road. Machine-gun fire was now sweeping the position. Sergeant J. C. Lawrie, taking cover with his detachment in half-dug slit trenches, saw the silhouette of a tank passing across the front of his gun position. He jumped up, laid, loaded and fired his gun himself and knocked the tank out.[2]

Three rounds can seldom have exercised such influence on a battle. Had the first tank, its breakdown adjusted, passed through the Battery line unscathed, with two tanks following up, Le Kef might have fallen; the whole North African campaign might have had to be fought over again.

As it was, the brief night encounter stirred Major Middleton to gigantic efforts. Infantry were coming back from the forward positions saying that they had been over-run. Each gun had to be resited; each provided with slit trenches for defences; vehicles and quads sent back out of harm's way; for it was obvious that T Troop's line of guns was now the British front line. An attack at first light was inevitable; probably an infantry attack; and F Battery would abide the first shock of it.

It came with the dawn: but not an infantry attack. Instead, from the ridge in front came a torrent of shelling. Throughout the morning tanks appeared over the crest 1000 yards or so away; were engaged furiously over open sights, turned and were gone. Armour piercing shot ran out. H.E. was fired with the fuze-cap on. From time to time the battery guns were hidden from sight in rings of shell-bursts. Gunner R. R. Wilson, while laying, was killed by a direct hit on his gun.

"It was almost unbelievable", says Major Fyffe, "that their crews could remain alive. No sooner, however, did the enemy shelling slacken than the gunners leaped from their slit trenches and carried on with their interrupted programme, firing like mad until they were again dowsed by the enemy . . . The way in which the gunners served their guns is a sight which will always remain in our memories.

"Their Battery Commander also was outstanding; sometimes moving about his guns unflurried by the enemy 'stonks', sometimes scrambling up a hill behind them whence he yelled fire orders and shouted encouragement to his magnificent teams. From time to time an ambulance came up to the battery position to take away the wounded, but F Battery never failed to respond to their commander's calls. At dusk the enemy fire died down, and during the night the Germans withdrew; but it had been a near thing."

The Germans withdrew. They reported—as was later discovered—that they had come up against determined opposition from greatly superior forces. In fact, to the 70 German tanks still available for battle, there were just 10 tanks left in the two cavalry regiments—plus F Battery.

It was a fine piece of leadership, for which Major Middleton received a Military Cross; and honours fell thick on his team. Captain Pirie—he had been an inspiration throughout the action until he was wounded—also received the M.C.

All ranks were particularly pleased when the same award fell to Captain "Ike" Buchanan. This Canadian officer, attached to the Regiment, so quickly made his mark that the Battery Commander asked for him to be posted and gave him command of T Troop.

Throughout the day at Thala he manned an O.P. in a most exposed position. His line was cut by shell fire as often as not. Disregarding it, he shouted orders and words of encouragement without ceasing. By evening he had lost his voice. However, rather than have any time on his hands he seized a rifle, and claimed several hits. His running commentary not only cheered his own men. It was warmly appreciated by the Rifle Brigade.

One shot each—plus their admirable conduct throughout the action—won Sergeant Lawrie the D.C.M. and Sergeant Ainslie the Military Medal.

During the fight the Battery were visited by Brigadier H. J. Parham. He went from gun to gun giving generous praise and heartening all by his presence. A sketch of the scene at midday on 22 February which he made at the time and sent to Major Middleton, shewing "F Battery with nothing in front", hangs in Armoury House.

F Battery's casualties numbered 1 killed, 11 wounded. The latter owed their lives largely to Gunners J. D. Kerr and L. J. Peters, driver and wireless operator of one of the troop leaders' trucks. On their own initiative they worked an ambulance service throughout the action, getting all casualties—both from their own Battery and from neighbouring units—back to the advanced dressing station, often running the gauntlet of shell fire. They each received the Military Medal.

So much for the prompt action which the American reverse required. Tact also was needed. It was lavishly supplied. General Alexander, with a self-effacement such as no government had ever before enjoined and only a few generals in military history have displayed, came across from a theatre where his forces were rounding off a historic victory, to act as deputy and subordinate to a general whose operations had not yet achieved quite the same measure of success. His arrival began to put the North African front on an even keel.

His first move was to obtain a list of the actual location of every fighting unit and sub-unit of First Army, and order that there should be no further sub-division, but that formations should be reconstituted and concentrated as soon as possible. It was, however, almost a month before this could apply to 12 Regiment, so numerous were the calls still to be made on them. His next step was to signal his comrade in arms, General Montgomery, to do something to draw off pressure from the Americans.

Brigadier de Guingand took the signal to his Army Commander. "His action was immediate and generous. It is at such moments that Montgomery is at his best . . . Although it meant upsetting his carefully worked out programme leading to the battle of Mareth, he ordered 7 Armoured and 51 Divisions to press forward, and so worry the enemy and threaten the weakened garrison of the Mareth Line . . .

"I wish I had a copy of Montgomery's reply to Alexander to reproduce in full. It started by saying what he proposed to do, went on to say that he expected this action to force Rommel to turn against him, and finished with something like this: '. . . in this way we will get Rommel running about like a wet hen between us'. That is just what did happen." [3]

For the rest of the Regiment the aftermath of the battle of Thala contained a serio-comic note. Regimental H.Q., with C and D Batteries, had been ordered to move from Rohia, where they were no longer in contact with the enemy, to back up a thrust which should clear the Germans from the Kasserine Pass. On the night of 23 February they moved to Kalat Djerda—but not by the straight westward road, for the situation at Thala was still obscure; it was uncertain whether Germans held the lateral road.

Instead, they were given the long northward route, three sides of a square, via the market town of Ebba Ksour. They arrived at Kalat Djerda at six in the morning, in steady rain, and had barely halted before orders arrived cancelling the move. They were to return at once to Rohia.

This time the telescope was applied, apparently, to the blind eye. They took the short eastward road—which, in fact, the C.O. had already reconnoitred—and were within five miles of their original starting place when fresh orders arrived. They were to return to Thala. An ancient precedent sprang to Captain Atherton's mind: the jingle of the famous commander who

had ten thousand men.
He marched 'em up the hill, and
He marched 'em down again.

"Is the Duke of York in charge?" he asked mildly.

Late that night the guns of C and D Batteries came into action alongside F, ready to support a Guards attack which had been planned for the following morning. By the time the "Anderson Circular Tour", as it became known in the Regiment, was over, the attack proved to be unnecessary—but it took place. When on 25 February the Guards Brigade advanced, the Germans had gone. They had left the mouth of the Pass, however, and the approach to it, strewn with mines, which caused many casualties to vehicles. Captain Hunt had his 8-cwt. blown up on one, and was severely shaken.

Last orders of the day were to pull out, back to Ebba Ksour. For the first time in North Africa, the entire Regiment had a good night's sleep, with no stand-to at first light.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

[1] "Three Years With Eisenhower", page 231.

[2] Three tanks to three shots is so stupendous a score that the two sergeants can well afford to share their laurels with a third. According to Major Middleton's reckoning, Sergeant Ainslie's sub-section got 1½ direct hits, Sergeant Stean's sub-section ½ a hit, Sergeant Lawrie 1.

[3] "Operation Victory", by Major-General Sir Francis de Guingand.

8. FURTHER PLUMBING

26 *February*—3 *April* 1943

The Regiment's rest was short-lived—and indeed "rest" was no name for these brief spells between moves. Only intensive maintenance, taken in hand whenever there was a breathing space, could ensure that mobility which General Alexander demanded. For Rommel was at bay.

Superhuman work by General Montgomery's Sappers had cleared the wreckage from Tripoli. It would not happen this time that a victorious pursuit would peter out at the end of a 1000-mile supply line; not this time; not to Montgomery. The gap which he had bridged so ruthlessly, by stripping 1 Armoured Division of their transport to feed his vehicles with fuel and his guns with shell, was a gap no longer. He had a supply base close at hand. There was the Mareth line still to be broken; but Rommel knew his Montgomery. He knew it *might* be broken.

If it was broken, at all costs there must be a coastwise alleyway through which the Afrika Korps, and such of the Italians as had not been left stranded in the Desert, could retire to the last fastness, the mountain-girt peninsula of Cape Bon. Here von Arnim offered him a refuge which would surely prove impregnable.

Bitterly, therefore, he struck out wherever that escape route might seem to be imperilled, seeking to break the ring which was closing round him.

Thus the Plumbers and the Plumbers' Mates must still be on the alert.

Fresh from one night's sleep at Ebba Ksour, 12 Regiment were called upon, at midday on 26 February 1943, to make another urgent move in company with 1 Guards Brigade—40 miles north to El Aroussa. An enemy force, attacking down the Testour track, threatened the town. For a while the situation was critical: cooks, clerks and batmen were in the line, holding on grimly. On 28 February the Guards attacked to restore the position, with 12 Regiment in support.

The thrust was beaten back in a spirited engagement at Steamroller Farm, notable for the tremendous dash with which the North Irish Horse handled their Churchill tanks. The field was littered with abandoned enemy vehicles. There was a fitters' festival on the morrow, as foraging parties scoured the battlefield for gear that would "come in useful".

It was hardly stowed away when the call came for another move northwards to the important road junction of Beja. A field battery of 46 Division, fighting desperately, had been overwhelmed at Sidi Nisr by a tank attack. Two sister batteries had exacted a stern revenge, catching the tanks in a deluge of shell fire as they floundered along a narrow, muddy road in a downpour of rain.

For 19 days 12 Regiment remained, drenched and uncomfortable, in 46 Division area, lest the German attack should be renewed. It was not; but twice D Battery were summoned further northward still, to Djebel Abiod, where a fresh thrust along the coastal road seemed likely.

By and large, however, the threat in the north died away, and a few lucky officers and other ranks of 12 Regiment were able to snatch a rapturous 48 hours' leave in a French holiday hotel at Ain Draham.

The first, impromptu, phase of the Regiment's battle career was over. On 22 March they moved by night 50 miles westwards to Sakiet Sidi Youssef.

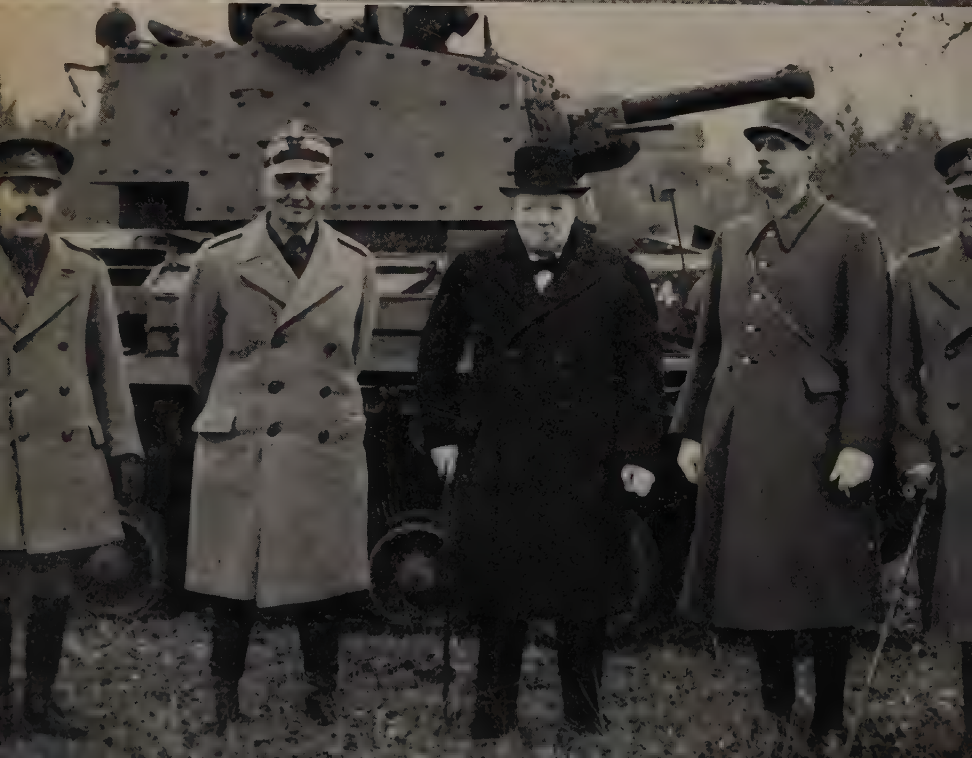
As each battery got into harbour in this lovely wooded area they were given 48 hours completely undisturbed: the first 24 for sleep, the remainder for cleaning up. It was their first real rest since they had landed in Africa. Thereafter they

13 REGIMENT, *January 1943* *BELOW*

FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: *Lieut. (Q.M.) G. R. Badham, Rev. N. J. Woodhall, R.A.Ch.D., Capt. A. S. Davies, Adjutant, Major O. C. H. Burton(k), B.C. G Battery, Major G. M. T. Morphew, 2nd-in-C., Lt.-Col. H. C. Phipps, C.O., Major J. F. Murphy, B.C. I Battery, Major G. W. Smyth-Osborne, B.C. H Battery, Capt. R. C. Rowland-Clark, Capt. W. G. Hendry, R.A.M.C., 2/Lieut. L. Fraser.*

MIDDLE ROW: *Lieut. J. M. Reichwald, Lieut. J. E. Nicoll, Lieut. G. G. R. Hickes, Lieut. W. D. M. Webb, Lieut. R. H. C. Probert, Lieut. G. D. H. Budgen(k), Capt. P. Kinnersley, Lieut. F. T. Smith, R.Sigs., Lieut. A. N. Young, Lieut. A. F. Hodgson, Capt. H. W. D. Cottam, Lieut. A. E. Bainbridge.*

BACK ROW: *Lieut. F. R. Jennings, Capt. H. G. S. Davidge, Capt. D. St. D. McCulloch, 2/Lieut. P. S. H. Plaisted, Lieut. A. N. Bicket, Capt. K. S. Hay, Lieut. H. T. Fost, Capt. C. P. Vivian(k), Lieut. P. Gotz, Lieut. E. A. Barson(k), Lieut. E. W. I. Palamountain, Lieut. R. B. Quarelle.*



turned their minds again to the normal task of a Royal Horse Artillery Regiment—the support of armour. All 6 Armoured Division were concentrated there: the cavalry regiments drawing the Sherman tanks with which, in the final battle for Tunis, they were to take the field.

It was a period of hard training, broken by an exercise—Grey Wolf—in which, with General Alexander looking on, the Division showed their paces under the inscrutable gaze of a Turkish military mission.

By the time 12 Regiment came into action again, 16 days later, the stage was almost set for the spring assault—the final assault—on Tunis.

OPPOSITE

The Prime Minister with 1 Armoured Division, *Thursley Common, February 1941*

left to right, upper: *Capt. P. Donner, A.D.C. to G.O.C., Major-Gen. C. W. M. Norrie, commanding 1 Armoured Division, the Prime Minister, Brig. C. M. Vallentin, Lt.-Col. Ebbels, commanding 11 Regt., Lt.-Col. Titcombe, commanding 61 L.A.A. Regt., Lt.-Col. McCarthy, commanding 76 A.T. Regt.*

lower: *Major-Gen. Sir Giffard Martel, Director, Royal Armoured Corps, Gen. Sikorsky, the Prime Minister, Gen. de Gaulle, Major-Gen. Norrie.*

9. FONDOUK GAP

4-12 *April* 1943

The Regiment set off to Sbiba on 4 April. 8 Army had fought their battle at Wadi Akarit. Once again Rommel was in retreat. Could he be cut off before he reached his stronghold: or at all events could he be made to divert his troops away from the coastal strip so that General Montgomery, by another of his characteristic manœuvres, could force his way through? With this alternative task in mind IX Corps were to attack and breach the Fondouk Gap, where a wide valley between two ranges of foothills narrowed into a defile leading down to the coastal plain.

The northern arm, towards the little white town of Pichon, was to be taken by British troops, an operation which involved a river crossing and the capture of a difficult feature, Jebel Rhorab. The southern arm was to be seized by the American 34 Division. Then 26 Armoured Brigade, with 12 Regiment in support, would push through the gap, to tackle any forces the enemy might deploy in the plain, and to push on to the sea.

After 24 hours' fighting, when Brigadier "Pip" Roberts, with the C.O., came up to reconnoitre the Gap, it was clear that the ideal moment for an armoured thrust had not arrived. Rhorab had still to be taken, which the Welsh Guards were in process of doing. The American division, newly up from lines of communication, had made no progress at all.

Suddenly out of the morning mist appeared Lieut.-General Crocker, former commander of 6 Armoured Division and now commanding the Corps: "a very quiet and determined man . . . splendid on this occasion, very calm and sensible".

He nodded agreement of the Brigadier's appreciation; and then he added: "Thirty miles away is Monty. The Boche is retreating, holding the Gap with a flank guard. He cannot reinforce it. If he is strongly attacked, he will go. I know there will be minefields, and this shelling; but at the moment a few men and mobile guns are holding up the might of a whole Armoured Division. If the attack is made and fails, I will forgive that: that is my responsibility. But I will not forgive anyone who fails to try ".

The attack was made, and did not fail.

"It was a clear example", said Lieut.-Colonel Barstow in a letter home, "of the personality and determination of a commander influencing the battle by being in the right place at the right time. I was thrilled to be there."

Under the smoke screen laid down by Lieut.-Colonel Barstow and Major Middleton, 17/21 Lancers "barged through" an enemy position which was still—minefield, anti-tank defences, infantry position—virtually intact, while the Batteries plastered enemy positions on the hillside with high explosive. The cavalry had a lot of tanks blown up by mines and heavy anti-tank fire; but 16/5 Lancers took their own line, and 2 Lothians and Border Horse followed along their trackmarks.

During the night British Sappers cleared the mines, and at first light 12 Regiment and the rest of the Brigade moved through, and rumbled across the plain of Kerouan in a Brigade box formation—past prosperous Arab villages in whose pastures grazed big flocks of goats and sheep, and camels with their supercilious foals.

Here and there extempore enemy forces tried to bar their way. Some anti-tank guns were knocked out by the Regiment; some prisoners taken. As the Brigade neared Kerouan itself, Islam's third most holy city,[1] a more formidable force—30 or 40 German Mark III tanks and some Italian M 13s—opposed them and were duly brushed aside. The score was 12 tanks and several guns.

In his captured jeep the C.O. had to give his gunners a line of their own. The Sherman tanks could take any sort of country. They made nothing of the succession of irrigation ditches that crossed their path every hundred yards. But these little obstacles gave the quads and guns, and wheels generally, something to think about. Faithfully, wheel rut to wheel rut, they took their Colonel's lead while he kept his mount in the same field, so to speak, as the Brigadier's Sherman. "It is rather like following a hunter on a jolly good pony", he commented when the hunt was over.

As he gathered his batteries together into close leaguer for the night—throughout the day they had been with their own armoured regiments—there came the news that Major John Ellison, former commander of F Battery and then Brigade Major to "Tiger"—Brigadier Lyon-Smith—had been killed in an accident further back: a brilliant officer who might have risen to great heights.

Major Adam Block had to return for a spell to H.Q. Royal Artillery; Eric Causton stepped into the post of Second-in-Command and—for one day—Douglas Hughes took over D Battery. Then, as his tank jumped a little hidden wadi in the dark the roof came down on him and knocked him out, so Major Causton went back to D Battery.

The forcing of Fondouk Gap (of which millions of Britons and Americans were no doubt unaware) had an influence on the conduct of the war—and not in North Africa only—out of all proportion to its military importance.

True, it had taken twice as long as it ought to have done. The Germans had been given ample time to get most of their flank guard away. The American division who had not succeeded in their task were half trained and had spent most of their time in North Africa guarding the long, long line of communications. General Crocker—himself wounded a few days later—had been frank in a press conference about their shortcomings. German prisoners had made caustic comments on the fighting qualities of the American soldier.

Even British units (who should have remembered that, if the British Army wins the last battle, it has not always won all the intervening ones) were not unanimously tactful. Even 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment, R.H.A. D Battery had just captured a couple of jeeps which the Germans, in turn, had captured from the Americans; and put their painters to work, not obliterating all previous marks, but adding, to the U.S. and German symbols, 6 Armoured Divison's badge of the armoured fist. For the first time since the campaign began, cracks were appearing in the Anglo-American partnership.

General Eisenhower took a decisive hand. There was more in this than some rather disparaging chaff on the one side, some rather surly soreness on the other. There was the future of a partnership which was next year to crush the power of Germany. The Supreme Commander put the problem squarely to that paragon of courtesy General Alexander.

In a few minutes the situation was righted. There were plain hints on both sides as to what would happen to officers or men whose comments spread dissension between the armies. The entire American II Corps were shifted from south to north, by a masterpiece of staff work in which General Alexander's staff and General Patton's collaborated.

There, in the taking of Bizerta, the formation, fighting together under their own commander, would win their spurs in a task of their own. And even though it denied General Montgomery the finishing touch to his victorious campaign, two of 8 Army's finest divisions, 7 Armoured Division, the authentic Desert Rats, and 4 Indian Division, with 201 Guards Brigade, should come across to First Army; and First Army should take Tunis.

Meanwhile, in box formation, 26 Armoured Brigade, here and there a pennant flying, were pounding northwards across a plain gay with young wheat, bright with marigold and daisy. They spent the night in close leaguer. The next morning's encounter, with an enemy force about a battalion strong plus several tanks and some self-propelled guns, was almost wholly the affair of the cavalry—the Lothians and 16/5 Lancers.

Cornfields had given way to heath and bumpy patches of scrub interspersed with innumerable tricky little wadis; and the gunners' quads and trailers, especially the 3-ton ammunition lorries, had increasing difficulty in keeping up with the Shermans, which still made nothing of such obstacles. By the time they could add the weight of their 25-pounders, so much fire was falling on the enemy from the tanks that the Batteries had great difficulty in observing their own rounds.

Dusk was falling as the Regiment leaguered close to the captured enemy positions. The self-propelled guns had got away; but wrecked anti-tank guns and lorries spoke of the success of the cavalry attack—still more so the crowds of infantry waiting to be escorted back as prisoners.

Uproar burst out again after dark. The Lothians, wheeling back to harbour after their pursuit, came upon half a dozen anti-tank guns and a column of lorries which had—so far—contrived to slip away unnoticed. Their first 75-mm. shell, hitting a German lorry square, lit the darkness with a blaze of exploding ammunition. The entire enemy column was reduced to wreckage.

One misfortune marred an otherwise satisfactory day. D Battery were heavily dive-bombed. Sergeant R. Temple, invaluable M.T. expert, was mortally wounded, with Gunner W. K. Sharpe and six other good men. Lieut. Denis Newbery, a promising new reinforcement, was wounded, with 10 others.

At 10 o'clock on 12 April a reconnaissance car, painted a dirty pink, pulled up at Regimental H.Q., four or five miles north of Sbika. It was 12 Regiment's first contact with 8 Army. That morning they had taken Sousse. Higher Command called a halt while they sorted things out.

All day, and for several days more, the Regiment watched streams of 8 Army vehicles moving by: either on their way to their next task, the probing of the tricky enemy positions at Enfidaville, where hills, running almost to the sea, pinch the coastal plain into a narrow strip along the shore: or crossing into First Army area, on loan for the final battle.

Dishevelled ruffians, their faces still mahogany brown from last summer's desert sun, their clothing a miscellany with a barely recognisable basis of khaki drill, drove vehicles draped with livestock, each tailboard garnished with a blackened cooking pot. When they halted, it was not so much—as in First Army's routine—to check their engines, as to give their poultry a run. They stared with a glad start of recognition at First Army's troops whose clothing, though by now diversified and war-worn, still bore traces of battledress. "By God! Soldiers!" they said.

NOTE TO CHAPTER NINE

[1] The pace was too good to inquire; but Kerouan, gleaming white in the sunshine, its mosques and minarets girt with a stout wall, framed in olive groves and plantations of prickly pear, was a place of pilgrimage for all the Muslims of North Africa: its fame second only to that of Mecca and Medina. Here, had there been leisure, were to be found the finest treasures of Saracenic architecture: the great mosque, its line of arches set by divine inspiration absolutely true to Mecca; its shrine—approached by the Beautiful Gate of sculptured wood—where the Faithful treasure three hairs of Mahomet's beard (or, as some say, the tomb of Mahomet's barber).

10. THE END IN AFRICA

19 *April*—12 *May* 1943

One lesson stood out from the gallop across the Kerouan plain. Towed 25-pounders were not the ideal mates for armoured regiments with their new tanks.

In the wider spaces of the Desert one facet of the lesson had been bitterly learned by 11 Regiment—the vulnerability of the unprotected gun and its detachment to enfilade fire from enemy tanks moving round the flank. Here in Tunisia, led though they were by the keenest of thrusters, the guns could not keep up, across country streaked with fissures—wadis, earth cracks, irrigation channels—the 25 miles per hour which the Shermans could do "all out".

While 12 Regiment looked to their overtaxed springs and axles, in harbour at El Ala and in the Forest of Kessera, Higher Authority made a reshuffle. 11 Regiment were whistled up to accompany, for this occasion, the cavalry regiments of 26 Armoured Brigade, while 12 Regiment would support 201 Guards Brigade.

On 19 April the preliminary moves began, setting the stage for the final battle. With strict secrecy precautions the Regiment moved up to their old haunt of Goubellat, with orders that not a gun was to be fired lest their presence should be known to the enemy. On their left 11 Regiment, with their Priests, took post.

For a day all was quiet; but at 0200 hours on 21 April the Germans put in a probing attack a battalion strong, with artillery support, and reached a hill on 11 Regiment's left flank from which they made things uncomfortable for a time, filling the area around 12 Regiment H.Q. with machine-gun bullets and provoking a brisk response from 11 Regiment's machine-guns. Still, as ordered, 12 Regiment held their fire, though at frequent intervals they were shelled, and had three men killed.

At last, at 1600 hours, Brigadier "Tiger" Lyon-Smith, C.R.A. 6 Armoured Division, lost patience and gave 12 Regiment the long-awaited word. Ten rounds gunfire on the enemy battery altered the situation completely. They pulled out, and Ayrshire

Yeomanry, in position forward of 12 Regiment, created carnage over open sights.

The interlude had caused quite a few casualties, however, and ruffled First Army's plans for the imminent attack: prelude to the final assault on Tunis. There was a regrouping of forces. Observation Post parties from 12 Regiment moved, by a roundabout route through El Aroussa, to join infantry of 46 Division north of Bou Arada, facing the notorious Two Tree Hill: a long and tiresome move during which Captain Massey brought down the lid of his tank on his head and retired for the time being from the battle. At 0430 hours 12 Regiment opened fire.

First light disclosed the misty Goubellat plain, now covered waist deep with the quick-springing green corn, full of advancing infantry; among them the few Churchills and the miscellany of other (and unsuitable) O.P. vehicles to which the Regiment had been reduced by breakdowns and casualties.

It was three hours or more before the German rearguards, sited in various farms, offered any opposition to the advance. One by one they were dealt with by heavy artillery concentrations; and the day's objective having been reached, 26 Armoured Brigade went through the infantry, with 11 Regiment in support.

After a watchful night, troubled by enemy snipers, 12 Regiment were switched back again to 26 Armoured Brigade. The whole line advanced through this and the following day (23/24 April) till, east of the marshy stretch known variously as the Salt Lake or Sugar Lake, 12 Regiment and the cavalry found themselves confronted with the craggy height of Jebel Kournine, a sort of inland Gibraltar, honeycombed with galleries from which enemy observation posts and guns dominated a wide plain.

A new lesson[1] had now to be learned: not by 12 Regiment, who knew it well enough, but by Higher Authority. It was simply this: if you want observation when supporting armour, you must give the O.P. officer a tank; and a new one in replacement, if his tank is a casualty. Lack of such cost the Regiment dear in these few days, as their O.P.s, in carriers, scout cars and 8-cwt. trucks, moved among the armour, the Commanding Officer himself functioning in his nimble jeep. For the shelling the Batteries and the armour endured was by far the heaviest they had encountered throughout the campaign.

Higher Command's ruse—though expensive—had succeeded. The enemy had concentrated virtually all the tanks they had in

Tunisia in rear of the mountain fortress, to counter what looked like First Army's main thrust. When, a week later, the real attack came in south of Medjez they had little armour to meet it.

Meanwhile the troops concentrated beneath the mountain bore the brunt. Undisturbed and ungetatable, the German guns harried the plain with continuous and accurate shell fire. Their own infantry, advancing—but only to give themselves up—were deterred from doing so by mortar fire aimed with equal precision.

Major Middleton was severely wounded; Captain Cracknell; then Major Causton. Despite their losses, the Batteries, down to five or six officers each, were at the top of their form; B.S.M.s and N.C.O.s in command posts showed their outstanding worth. Lieut. H. C. Swift was killed on his gun position. Two days later the Regiment lost Sergeant J. C. Lawrie, their first D.C.M., killed by shell fire.

By night, as the enemy guns quietened (by comparison, at all events, with their activity by day) their aircraft took over, dropping flares and bombs. The Regiment suffered some casualties from this, and their friends the Ayrshire Yeomanry lost their second commanding officer in two days when their Regimental H.Q. received a direct hit.

Nobody was ill-pleased when, on 27 April, the Regiment were ordered back south of Goubellat, though there was some adverse comment when Mitchells of the American Air Force bombed the leaguer during church parade next day—fortunately without causing casualties in the Regiment.

On all sides of the German-Italian force in Tunis, the Allies were now closing in. Around the coast their blockade by sea and air made reinforcement hazardous, then impossible. Every new day brought Axis commanders fresh tidings of disaster: of Italian destroyers, each with 1600 men aboard, sunk or floating aflame from stem to stern; of 21 six-engined transport planes, each carrying 120 troops, shot down into Tunis Bay.

With landing grounds abundant and hardened by the spring sun, Allied air power had reached the pitch of 2700 sorties in a day. Gunners and generals listened in with grim satisfaction as Axis units bade their homelands a despairing farewell.

In the far north, American troops nudged forward, as backward horses get into line at the starting gate. Frustrated and angry over their early rebuffs, II Corps, now under their third commander, Lieut.-General Omar Bradley, hammered at Point 609, their local equivalent of Kournine—and 34 Division won their spurs at last by driving the Germans from its crest. On 3 May the Americans had Mateur. For First Army there was Longstop Hill to be cleared; for whose summit more blood had been shed than over any other Tunisian objective.

Then from sea to sea the Allied armies—in all the equivalent of 13 divisions—were ready for the final battle.

It flamed from north to south, as fire rushes down a train of powder. Along the northern coast, 9 U.S. Division, with French Goums, sprinted for Bizerta. As dusk fell on 5 May, 1 Division of V Corps went forward north of the Medjez-Tunis road. One arm of their thrust swung left, past ancient Carthage,[2] to meet at Protville the American right.

In the hour before dawn on 6 May IX Corps (4 Indian and 4 British Divisions) burst open the enemy's defences and through the gap 6 and 7 Armoured Divisions charged through to Tunis, the two Armoured Car Regiments, 1 Derby Yeomanry and 11 Hussars, making a neck and neck race of it into the town.

Working with precision the French took their objective, Pont du Fahs, on the same day (7 May) as Bizerta and Tunis fell. Only at the eastern end of the arc was progress slow; for here 8 Army, denuded of half their strength, faced the bulk of the German forces arrayed in formidable defensive positions among the hills: concentrated there because they thought 8 Army, having hit them so often and so far, must surely be the one to deliver the *coup de grâce*.

12 Regiment's part in all this was, as the battle opened, to pass through 4 Division and form, with 201 Guards Brigade,[3] an anti-tank screen on the right of 6 Armoured Division's advance. As things turned out, no counter-attack materialised; nor did 6 Armoured Division meet with serious opposition until 8 May found them banging at the gate of the Hamman Lif defile.

It was reckoned by the Germans an impassable barrier. The high ground a mile inland was held by their infantry and here the Welsh Guards—Captain Hunt and Captain Kirk doing F.O.O. with the leading companies—put in an attack.

By dawn the hill top was theirs, though to look over the far edge was to provoke a shower of bullets. The Lothians had gone in gamely along the beach: a great feat of arms, this, and decisive. Now the C.R.A. called on the Regiment, and indeed on all his guns, for a special effort—40 rounds gunfire on the town.

Battery captains winced at the expenditure. But Higher Authority knew that not much more ammunition would be needed.

The gate to Cape Bon was wide open; and leaving to others the spring cleaning of that area (as big as Hampshire) the Regiment swung south-east for General Alexander's final manœuvre—the 30-mile night march across the base of the peninsula, to take in rear the forces facing 8 Army.

It was not unopposed. Two blown bridges were encountered, covered by enemy infantry; but by the morning of 11 May the Regiment were in Hammamet.

For the last time in North Africa, the Regiment came into action on 12 May. Between Bou Ficha and Enfidaville a heavy air bombardment was carried out—preliminary to an attack. There was no attack. The enemy area was dotted with white flags. A wireless car of the Derby Yeomanry picked up a message. It was the Commander of the First Italian Army announcing, with perfect B.B.C. technique, his surrender.

Six months to the day from the Regiment's landing in North Africa, the task had been completed.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TEN

[1] This lesson was driven home with immediate and salutary results by a chance incident. On his way back, severely wounded, Cecil Middleton happened upon Lieut.-Colonel Richard Goodbody, also wounded but not badly (see page 124). Hearing how Middleton had become a casualty, Goodbody (he was already determined, anyhow, not to be evacuated) went in his staff car straight to Brigadier Cameron Nicholson, B.G.S. First Army; who, a gunner himself and former Second-in-Command of 6 Armoured Division, knew 12 Regiment and everybody in it. Nicholson acted at once. Before the next move up to Kournine six Honey tanks had arrived at 12 Regiment H.Q. It was typical of Goodbody to disregard his own wound and the fact that it was not his own Regiment that had suffered; typical, too, of Nicholson (later Sir Cameron Nicholson, the Master Gunner) to get things going with real R.H.A. alacrity.

[2] Once again, the pace was too good to inquire: but it must have been present in some scholarly minds that war had flung 12 Regiment within a stone's-throw of ancient Carthage, once mistress of the Mediterranean and granary of Rome, whose bounds the bright-idea'd Queen Dido measured with a shredded oxhide. 12 Regiment H.A.C. (had there been time to meditate on such things) could claim a special interest in this proud city, which had an Honourable Artillery Company of its own, the nursery of officers to which the best families in the State contributed their sons. North Africa conquered, it was to be the Regiment's fortune to win fresh laurels where Carthage's greatest son Hannibal had led his legions to victory two thousand years ago.

[3] Commanded by Brigadier Julian Gascoigne, later Colonel Commandant H.A.C.

11. INTERLUDE

May 1943—*April* 1944

For 10 months 12 Regiment were out of the battle line. Until Sicily had been conquered, and the civil and military outlook in Italy had taken shape, it was their lot to remain in North Africa rearming and preparing for whatever might be their next task.

It was a time of many changes. Chief among them was the clean sweep of the old, vulnerable towed 25-pounder.

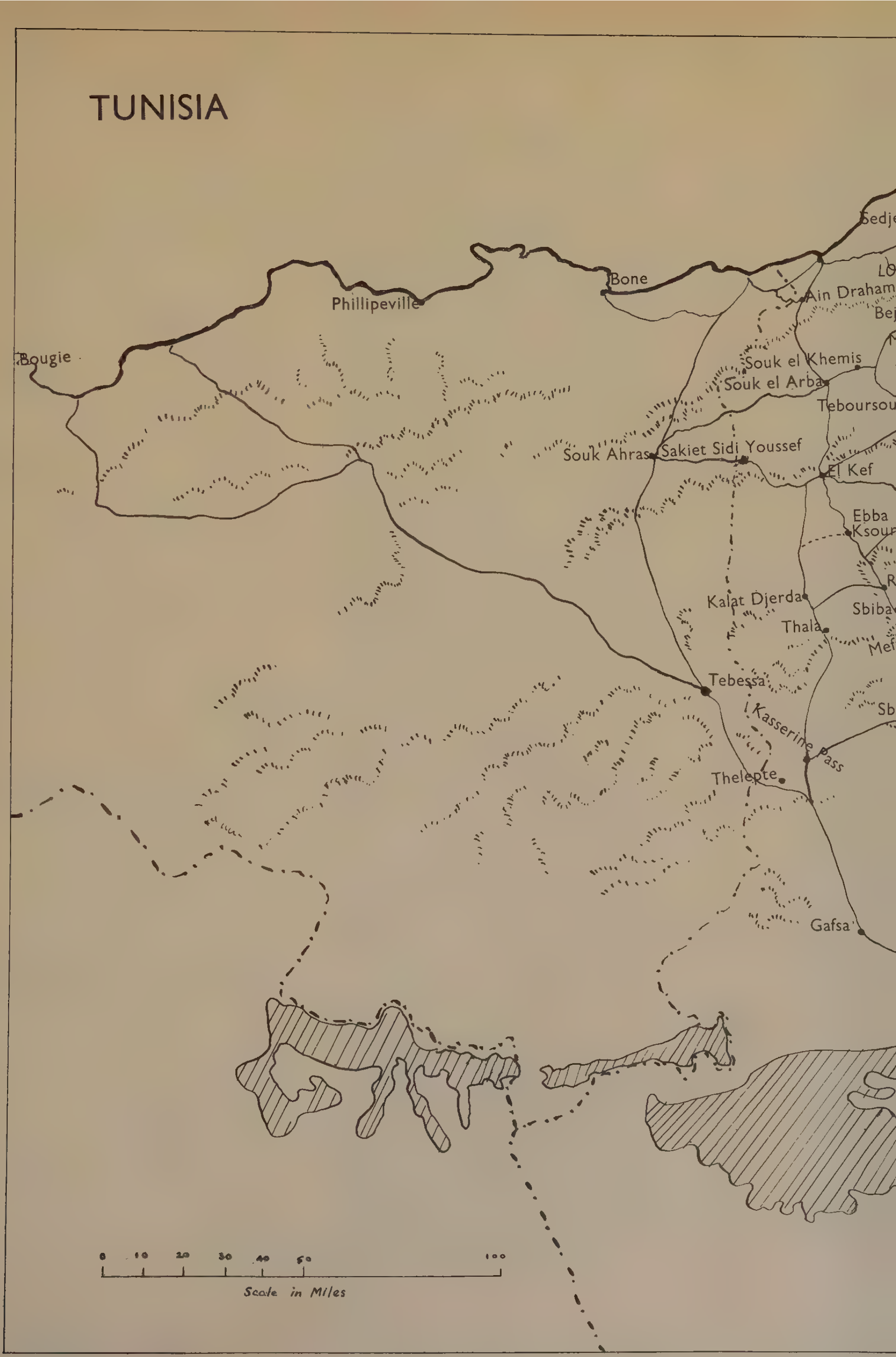
Rearmed in August with the Priest, the self-propelled 105-mm. gun, the Regiment had all winter to perfect the new tactics which this implied; to run in, and fit with innumerable devices, the Sherman tanks which would be the observation posts of the future, the White scout cars, half-tracks and other new vehicles which went with the new armament; above all, to link each Battery in the closest possible co-operation with the Armoured Regiment with whom they would take the field. Batteries lived with the cavalry; C.O. and Second-in-Command with Brigade H.Q.

Only one Regiment—11 (H.A.C.) Regiment—had so far fought Priests in action. It was fortunate for their comrades of 12 Regiment—the second to receive the new arm—that 11 Regiment, back from their campaign in Sicily, were near enough from October 1943 until February 1944 to be able to give first hand advice on all the tricks of the new equipment.

Both Regiments, incidentally, flew over their camps the Regimental flags which Major Goold Walker had just sent them.

Though by and large it was a period of rest and relaxation, with much interchange of hospitality, it was a busy time for battery commanders and their artificers especially; and the work they put in was well repaid when they found themselves in action again.

Units, as well as armament, had taken on a new look. The detachment which took part in the victory parade in Tunis[1] on 20 May, and the entire Regiment when they paraded for the C.R.A.'s inspection five days later, had cast the free-and-easy dishabille of their six months of alternate movement and battle.



TUNISIA

Bougie
Phillipeville
Bone
Sedje
Ain Draham
Bej
Souk el Khemis
Souk el Arba
Teboursou
Souk Ahras
Sakiet Sidi Youssef
El Kef
Ebba Ksour
Kalat Djerda
Sbiba
Thala
Mef
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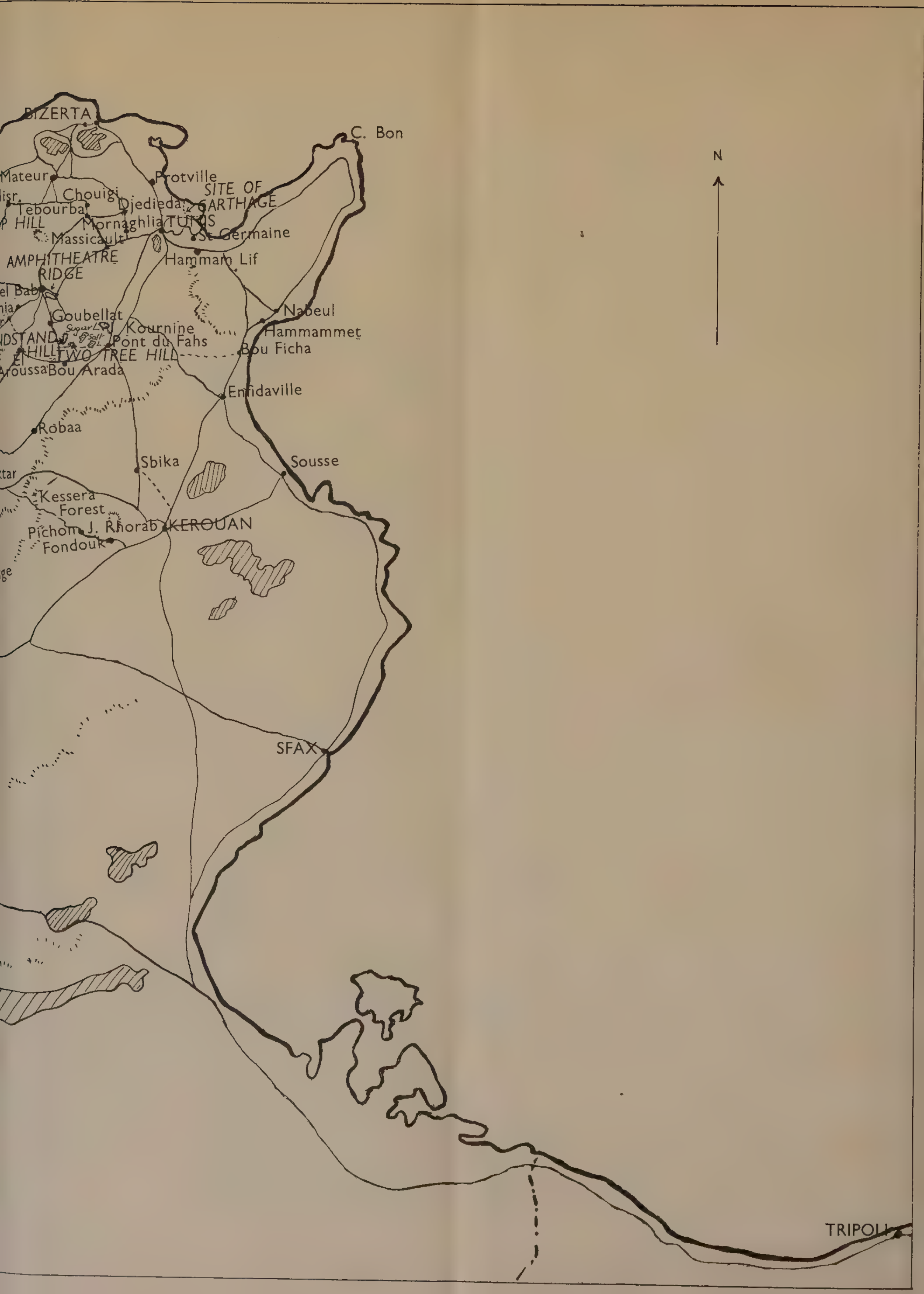
Scale in Miles

SHAW & SONS LTD., E.C.4.


BIZERTA
C. Bon
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SITE OF CARTHAGE
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AMPHITHEATRE RIDGE
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nia
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Nabeul
Hammammet
Sugar Loaf
Salt
Kournine
Pont du Fahs
NDSTAND HILL
TWO TREE HILL
Bou Ficha
Aroussa
Bou Arada
Enfidaville
Robaa
Sbika
Sousse
ktar
Kessera Forest
Pichon
J. Rhorab
KEROUAN
Fondouk
ge
SFAX
TRIPOLI

W. REEVES.

When they came, for the third time in their history, under the eye of their Captain General, at His Majesty's inspection of the Divisional Artillery at Penthièvre on 17 June 1943, it was a turnout which would have passed muster at Armoury House.

Part II Orders noted many changes of personnel as the Regiment welcomed officers and men recovered from their wounds: Major Middleton back in command of F Battery, Captain Pirie. Other ranks by the dozen, in hospital at Algiers and elsewhere, had moved heaven and earth to get back to the Regiment; their efforts accelerated by all the pressure the C.O. could bring to bear, coupled with visits by their battery and troop commanders to the hospitals and reinforcement centres.

A wanderer returned in early spring who had much to tell—Captain Gilbert, taken prisoner at Amphitheatre Ridge. He and Lieut. Davies had been fellow inmates of Campo 49 in North Italy, outside Parma. At the Italian armistice the commandant had played fair with his charges: turned them loose into the countryside before the Germans arrived to take over. A hundred found their way into Switzerland—100 miles; half as many had set out southwards and managed to cross the Allied lines in ones and twos during the next six months.

Captain Gilbert reached the Canadian sector on 1 November and was back on duty with the Regiment in February.

Lieut. Davies had worse luck. After 40 days' walking he was almost within sight of the British lines south of the Sangro when he was wounded and recaptured. He was taken back to Germany, again escaped, was retaken in Prague, and did not regain his freedom until the war was virtually over.

There were vacancies by promotion, too. Major Adam Block was posted to command 75 Field Regiment R.A., and replaced as Second-in-Command by Major C. G. Buttenshaw. Captain Lincoln, after a spell in command of D Battery, joined the Ayrshire Yeomanry as Battery Commander.[2]

Captain J. Diamond got a Battery in 72 Anti-Tank Regiment. And at the close of the year the officer who had been father and mother to the Divisional Artillery since its training days in England, the renowned "Tiger", Brigadier T. Lyon-Smith, departed for higher spheres. Whenever the guns were firing—at practice camp or in battle—he had been there; spreading always the offensive spirit, demanding always only one standard, that of the Royal Horse Artillery.

For a fortunate few, in the early days of the interlude, there was an enviable spell of duty escorting prisoners of war to England; for one or two there was compassionate leave.

For the rest, there was a salubrious summer and not-too-arduous winter on the seacoast at Robertville near Phillipeville: not too far from Algiers to permit the C.O.—accompanied, on a strictly official trip, by his three Battery Commanders, Stanley Rae, Douglas Hughes and Cecil Middleton—to attend the "superbly run" ball given by 11 Regiment "out to return hospitality and shew the cavalry how a party should be run". He found many old H.A.C. men gathered there and reported "a thoroughly Sutling Room atmosphere".

Only one enemy disturbed 12 Regiment's peaceful interlude—malaria. It was destined to be, for the rest of their service, a menace to be reckoned with; as its prevention was henceforth to be part of their training.

Much had happened before 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment again took their place in the battle line. Sicily, in just over a month of fighting (10 July–17 August 1943), had been conquered. General Montgomery, slipping his forces across the Straits of Messina, had invaded the mainland of Europe and linked with the Allied armies landed at Salerno.

Mussolini had fallen; Italy had surrendered. The Germans had taken over, occupying Rome and sacking Naples, and the Italians had declared war on them: bringing to mind Machiavelli's caustic saying of 400 years before: "There is no example in history where the House of Savoy has finished a war at the side of the same ally as it began that war, except where there has been time to change twice during the same war".

The enemy's winter line broken, the Allies had crossed the Sangro. General Montgomery had taken leave of 8 Army, which he had led in a succession of unparalleled victories, and back in his old school was preparing for fresh triumphs in another theatre of war.

The landing at Anzio had taken the Germans by surprise and spurred them to such bitter resistance that for days it was touch and go whether the bridgehead could hold. As Cassino's Monastery Hill, honeycombed with deep shelters, barred the Allies' advance, the opposing armies faced one another in March in a position of stalemate.

Such was the state of the campaign when 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment embarked in three echelons (from Bizerta, Bone and Phillipeville) for Naples. By 22 March 1944 personnel were all ashore, and by 6 April their Priests had been unloaded and the Regiment were assembled at Piedmonte D'Alife, 40 miles north of Naples.

From now on the Batteries' lot was to be cast for the most part with the three armoured cavalry Regiments with whom they had welded, in North Africa, an enduring partnership: C Battery with 16/5 Lancers, D with 2 Lothians and Border Horse, F with 17/21 Lancers.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ELEVEN

[1] The dinner at Nabeul following this ceremony, at which 80 officers and 150 sergeants of 11 and 12 (H.A.C.) Regiments entertained the Commanders, Royal Artillery of their respective Divisions, has already been noted.

[2] His success with his new Regiment may be gauged from the citation awarding him (in 1945) the Military Cross. "An untiring, efficient and most courageous Battery Commander . . . His great patience and courage showed in reconnaissance, his readiness to seize every opportunity to kill the enemy, and his very careful and well-thought-out artillery plans earned him the love and highest respect possible from the whole battalion (2 Coldstream Guards) he was supporting.

"On Mount Verro he nightly visited his O.P. with the forward company, under harassing shell and Spandau fire. On several occasions German raiding parties were dispersed by accurate defensive fire falling a few yards in front of our own troops. Major Lincoln proved a pastmaster at controlling this close defensive fire which gave his Battalion complete trust in their supporting artillery."

12. CASSINO AND ON

11 *May*—6 *June* 1944

Twice the Monastery Hill of Cassino had defied Allied attack. On one day in March, 14,000 tons of bombs had been dropped on the town and on the Monastery above; yet, emerging from their deep-dug defences, the enemy had countered so fiercely the infantry attack which followed that virtually no progress had been made. Americans, who knew something of the difficulties, offered four to one that a third assault would meet the same fate.

On 11 May 1944, however, General Alexander launched so strong and well-planned a coast-to-coast attack that in a week the stronghold had fallen, and with it the Germans' second line of defence in Italy, the Gustav Line. It was a battle in which everything went according to plan; the best battle, in the opinion of General Martel,[1] which the Allies had fought together.

The Gustav Line, built up over a period of many months, was one of great strength. Across its front ran the swift-flowing River Rapido, northern branch of the Garigliano: a complete tank obstacle. Behind the river lay numerous minefields. These were covered by a series of positions prepared in depth and dug into the reverse slopes of the steep ridges and sunken lanes that intersected the close rolling country—orchards and olive groves, with lines of trees bordering every farm and almost every field; the whole interlaced with rural tracks and commanded, every inch of it, by the enemy's observation posts on Monastery Hill.

Every village and farm had been turned into a strong point, the civilian population ejected and buildings strengthened with sandbags and concrete.

Ten miles further back was another position known as the Hitler Line, based on the steep gorges around the village of

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OPPOSITE

From the Beach to the Rhine—13 Regiment

upper : *The nearly deserted shore (it was being heavily shelled at the moment).*
centre : *Trouble at the brook (Major Trotter's tank, Fife and Forfar).*
lower : *Empty Buffalo emerging from the Rhine to take another load of infantry across.*

S

Aquino, where concrete pillboxes had been sited and 88-mm. guns and turrets, taken from tanks, dug into the ground and cleverly concealed.

These two formidable obstacles barred Route 6, the road to Rome, which it was General Alexander's purpose to open.

Stretching downwards from the Adriatic coast, V and X Corps of 8 Army were to stage only feint attacks. It was the task of XIII Corps (Lieut.-General Kirkman) to cross the Rapido and, pushing on to its little tributary the Pioppeto, to cross this also, cutting Route 6 behind Cassino.

Meanwhile the Monastery Hill was to be blinded with smoke and then assaulted by the Polish Corps—first the high ground to the north and east, and finally the Hill itself. No attack was to be made on Cassino town, where 1 Guards Brigade and the German garrison were holding each other in trench-cum-cellar warfare.

On the left, south of the River Liri, Garigliano's western branch, General Juin's French Corps—with, incidentally, 9000 Goums—were to operate under 5 Army command, while from their left flank II American Corps would carry the attack down to the coast again.

Neither the ground over which the initial assault must be made nor the country beyond the river was suitable for the employment of an armoured division. Therefore, once over the river, the infantry—4 Division and 78 Division—would continue the advance, with the Sherman tanks of 26 Armoured Brigade, used on this occasion as infantry tanks, in close support.

For 12 Regiment there was to be a double role. In the opening assault they would reinforce with their fire the Artillery of 8 Indian Division. The river crossed, they would revert to their normal task, supporting their own Armoured Regiments in their unaccustomed mission. Only when a breakthrough had been achieved would 6 Armoured Division be re-formed. Then, passing through the infantry, they would continue the advance towards Rome.

It meant, for 12 Regiment, two separate gun areas: one for the barrage, another—to be occupied in the middle of the battle—

OPPOSITE

13 Regiment

READING DOWNWARDS: *H.Q. and leading battery halted before Cheux to allow 15 (S) Division to come through. British tanks burning in front of Cheux village. German armoured car destroyed in enemy counter-attack. German horse transport caught by the guns.*

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for the subsequent support of the armour. The area behind Mount Trocchio was already stiff with artillery. Moreover, it was under good, though distant, observation from the enemy. The C.O. and Second-in-Command walked almost every yard of the area, investigating every little fold in the ground, occupied or unoccupied; using a good deal of tact and ingenuity and—when an occasional enemy "stonk" suddenly descended—a good deal of agility.

The battle opened just before midnight on 11/12 May in a vast crash of artillery. Walking round the batteries as they fired the barrage—with the sky all around lit with flashes—Lieut.-Colonel Barstow was relieved to see how small a pin-prick of light the flashless propellant of his guns made. As he stumbled from troop to troop he heard a nightingale and stopped to watch it singing ecstatically, silhouetted against the blaze of the barrage. (The Liri valley was full of them, trilling night and day as if to drown in their chorus the roar of the guns.)

For both the infantry divisions 12 May was a day of bitter, frustrated fighting. St. Angelo, a ruined village on the high ground overlooking the river, proved a hard nut to crack, and Target Spleen, as it was called in code, had to receive a double plastering from the Regiment before it finally fell. Meanwhile 4 Division, assaulting in boats under cover of the barrage, just managed to establish a precarious foothold across the river, over which the Sappers, at great cost, succeeded in throwing a bridge (code-named Amazon).

Bridge and surrounding country had been ringed and covered with a suffocating screen of canister smoke. It denied the German observation, but into the cloud they poured almost continuous fire, alternated with attacks by dive bombers. When, after a day of continuous fighting, the infantry had achieved their objectives, 12 Regiment moved forward in the dust and turmoil of the battle to their second gun position nearer the river.

Through the pall of smoke D Battery's O.P.s, with the leading squadron of the Lothians, were already across the river: Captain Massey—first member of the Regiment to cross—Major Douglas Hughes and Captain Williams. By afternoon 17/21 Lancers had followed into the cooped-up bridgehead, with Major Middleton, Captain Pirie and Captain Bagnall.

C Battery's turn came at first light on 14 May, when 16/5 Lancers, with Major Rae in his battery commander's Sherman, and Captain Austin-Smith and Captain Atherton in their O.P. tanks, joined the already congested assembly in the bridgehead. Brigadier Neville Mitchell, commanding 26 Armoured Brigade, was there, with Lieut.-Colonel Barstow beside him.

Orders were to push on immediately, which for three-quarters of a mile they did; but the conditions were the best a resolute enemy, on the defence, could hope for. Fog, thickened no doubt by the smoke screen which still hung around the bridgehead, had reduced visibility to ten yards. Moving blindly through close country such as this, a tank might at any moment become the victim of a bold ambush.

Thus Captain Massey's tank was knocked out by a German who, emerging suddenly from cover, placed a couple of "sticky bombs" on the turret. Gunner A. F. Stansfield was killed, and Massey himself wounded with the remainder of his crew. Both the other Battery tanks were hit, but without serious harm being done.

Nor had the Lothians escaped. A Squadron were down to six tanks, B Squadron to five. Nevertheless the counter-attack which the enemy put in was also hampered by this unprecedented "fog of war", and it was held.

Major Middleton, too, had his tank hit. His driver and co-driver, Lance-Bombardier C. H. Holding and Gunner A. G. Maskell, were killed, and Bombardier Dunkley and Gunner Holmes wounded.

From the apex of the bridgehead the infantry with their armoured support pressed forward on 15 May. Captain Atherton was particularly commended for his fine shooting in support of 16 Lancers—a main factor in gaining him the award of the Military Cross. Captain Bagnall, engaging enemy dug-outs with his .75 and Browning, had an exciting half hour leading to the capture of 50 prisoners.

On the next day, too, heavy concentrations were fired by the Regiment as the armour moved forward, but a strong counter-attack by German parachute troops in the evening gave the local commanders some anxious moments. Captain Bagnall, having just scored a direct hit on an anti-tank gun, was himself immobilised and had to be towed back by Captain Pirie.

Higher Command, however, had cause to view this attack with satisfaction; for its object, as the next two days were to prove, was to cover the withdrawal of the German forces, at last, from Cassino.

The outcome of the battle was beginning to be seen on the following day, 17 May: for the bridgehead was now big enough to justify the guns being moved across the river. 12 Regiment were the first across. The advance out of the bridgehead was so well supported by the O.P.s of C and D Batteries that the infantry of 78 Division were able to take the heavily pounded village of Piumarola, some four miles west of the bridge, without themselves firing a shot. Major Douglas Hughes won his Military Cross in this engagement.

By noon on 18 May the glad news spread through the Army that Cassino and its Monastery fortress had fallen.

Now the so-called Hitler Line faced the advancing Army. Aquino, a key point in the line, seemed to be abandoned or thinly held when leading elements of 17/21 Lancers and the Derby Yeomanry approached it towards nightfall, and O.P.s of 12 Regiment moved forward in the dark with their cavalry regiments, followed by the whole Regiment. It was a nightmare advance through a bewildering tangle of rustic tracks, clogged with transport taking up fuel, ammunition and rations for the armour, and spattered with sporadic shell fire, pretty fierce at times.

The Germans, however, had reacted firmly to this thrust and so reinforced the fortified village during the night that Major General Keightley, now commanding 78 Division, decided it needed a set-piece assault. The task was given by General Alexander to the Canadian Corps who were being held in reserve.

The attack was launched on 23 May with tremendous artillery support, in which 12 Regiment took due part; and, succeeding after a bitter fight, paved a way, strewn with knocked-out tanks, for an advance through the Hitler Line. All went well as far as the River Melfa; but Captain Pirie, probing the far side of the river with a squadron of the Derby Yeomanry, found his way barred by a self-propelled anti-tank gun of 72 Regiment which had been knocked out on the bridge.

At that moment the enemy put in a counter-attack. The Derby Yeomanry, with Pirie in his Sherman, were stranded without infantry support, in close country which made the loss of their vehicles virtually certain. To ensure that they should not fall into enemy hands the Squadron Leader ordered them to be blown up, and their crews recrossed the river on foot. Captain Bagnall on the same day had his tank blown up on a mine, set out in a new one and then got a splinter in his back when the enemy, at midnight, bombed the entire Regimental area.

River by river the Germans contested the Allies' advance. The crossing of the Melfa was achieved next day (26 May) by the Grenadier Guards and 16/5 Lancers, but they were soon held up by the enemy rearguard on Monte Piccolo, a hill just south of Arce. It was later reported clear, and orders were being prepared for gun positions and O.P.s to be established there when Major Buttenshaw and Major Rae, reconnoitring, got a reception that made it all too clear that the enemy were still there. On the evening of 27 May the Coldstream Guards were given the task of clearing it, while the Grenadiers took the companion hill, Monte Grande.

Both met stiff resistance and considerable casualties. Having reached the top of Monte Grande, the Grenadiers were fiercely counter-attacked and driven back.

Their withdrawal would have been very costly but for the first class cover provided by Major Rae.

For a while the situation was extremely dangerous. With his gift for being in the right place at a crucial moment, Rae took matters in hand. Notwithstanding intense artillery and mortar fire and constant sniping, he brought down the fire of the Regiment, which, inflicting very heavy casualties on the enemy, broke the counter-attack and enabled the Battalion to establish themselves in new positions. During the day Major Rae directed the fire of the whole Divisional Artillery on the many targets that appeared on Monte Grande.

Captain Austin-Smith, too, had an exciting day. Sent up with two troops of 16/5 Lancers to support the Guards, he was misdirected. Captain Eveleigh of the Lancers, in the leading tank, stopped in a defile between high embankments to check his map, and got out of his turret to have a look round. He was promptly shot by a sniper and his tank wrecked by a bazooka.

Captain Austin-Smith at once opened fire with his Browning, took on board the unwounded crew of the wrecked tank, backed his own tank down the track with great coolness and skill until he was able at last to make a difficult turn; all the time inflicting casualties on the enemy and keeping them at bay.

Many times before, his complete disregard for his personal safety had been remarked upon as, up with the most forward troops, he had brought effective fire to their support just where they wanted it. This episode in the ambush was the culmination of a spell of fine service which earned him the Military Cross.

Lieut. F. W. Woodward was slightly wounded here.

A wireless signal intercepted on 28 May brought news that the enemy intended that night to begin a general withdrawal, and for a month there ensued a steady and by no means uneventful pursuit which carried the Regiment 150 miles northward until, close by the ancient battlefield of Lake Trasimene,[2] the Germans again made a stand.

It was a moving battle which those who took part in it will not readily forget: when the first information of an enemy rearguard would be, as likely as not, the sudden descent of a burst of shell fire. One of the armoured regiments would lead the line of march, with two squadrons and Regimental headquarters ahead; say 36 tanks on the road; behind them their supporting battery of 12 Regiment; their reserve squadron next, followed by Brigade H.Q. with the C.O.; then the Second-in-Command, with the C.P.O.s, G.P.O.s and, as close up as possible, the guns of the other batteries. The deployment of the leading battery was the responsibility of the battery commander; the remainder being controlled by the C.O. and the Second-in-Command.

Each burst of shell fire brought over and over again the same problem. Should the guns go into action, taking what scratch positions were immediately at hand; or should they press on? If they left it too late they might be caught in the open under direct observation from the high ground which the enemy could always hold while our troops were advancing up the valleys. But if they deployed too soon, the inexorable forward movement of the long line of transport would take their place in the column and it might be hours before, on a narrow winding road, they could regain their position.

The Regiment, after a brief halt for maintenance, moved on the night 2/3 June beneath the Sabine Hills, where enemy detachments still lurked: through Torrice, Frosinone, Alatri, Fiuggi, Acuto, Serrone, till at Genzano on 4 June the enemy made a determined stand.

C Battery, deployed in an awkward position, were heavily shelled. Lieut. E. C. Freeman, G.P.O. of X Troop, was killed, and Lance-Sergeant Hall badly wounded in the leg. Captain Austin-Smith, forward with C Squadron of 16/5 Lancers, managed to overturn his tank in a concealed dug-out, and throughout the afternoon his signaller achieved the astonishing feat of maintaining wireless communication upside down.

That day 5 Army entered Rome; but 26 Armoured Brigade pressed on, bypassing the Holy City, through 40 miles of lovely country by Tivoli (where Horace had his Sabine farm) till on 5 June the Lothians, with D Battery's O.P., hit the left bank of the Tiber at Fonte di Papa.

It was a day of great anxiety for Major Douglas Hughes. For the first and only time, his guns, threading their way over roads now thronged with British and American troops advancing from Rome, were unable to keep up with the tanks. By midnight on 5/6 June, to his relief, they had closed up again.

There is a picturesque glimpse of the night's halt in the 2 Lothians and Border Horse war history.[3]

"Here, by the shadowy house, the leaguer was formed as it had been on countless nights in the past. Down through the Tiber Valley blew the night wind, cool with moisture from the broad winding river. The tanks, formed in a defensive box, their guns outward pointing, lay silent save for the creaking noise of cooling metal in the engine compartments.

"Inside the box, the same hushed conversations, the same movement of vague figures in the darkness, the sounds of boots clambering on armour, the clink of a filler cap, the gulping and chuckling of fuel being poured from the can. Places might vary —a plain in Tunisia, a field by the Rapido, a village by the Tiber. The nightly leaguer changed but little otherwise."

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWELVE

[1] "Our Armoured Forces."

[2] Here Hannibal, 2160 years before, had destroyed the army of Flaminius. Fifteen thousand Romans died in a fight so hot that neither side heeded the shock of an earthquake severe enough to shatter many Italian cities.

[3] "Driver Advance", by D. G. Antonio.

13. "FOR THIS RELIEF . . ."

June—November 1944

There followed days of hectic bursts of shooting: as on 6 June, when a column of German armoured cars and trucks gave Major Douglas Hughes and his partner Major Rodney Parsons, of 2 Medium Regiment, a chance to see what they could do. All the artillery were catching up now, and spreading themselves over the grassy downs—the Ayrshire Yeomanry and 2 R.H.A.—and Major Hughes had once more the satisfaction of getting an "Uncle" target when he asked for it.

Each Regiment leading in turn, with their linked H.A.C. Battery, the advance reached Orticoli on 12 June. Here, coming into action in full view of the enemy, D Battery experienced some very heavy shelling indeed. Z Troop's command post was obliterated by a direct hit which killed Lieut. H. W. M. McNicholas, Bombardier T. White, Bombardier G. V. Leech, and Gunners P. Ricketts and F. E. Jones.

In 10 minutes, however, Lieut. A. D. A. Newbery had reorganised and the Troop were shooting again. His fine conduct on this occasion was the principal factor in earning him the Military Cross.

The northward advance along the Tiber was notable for two features, both disturbing from the gunner's point of view. When D Battery, with the Lothians, reached the little town, they had quite out-run their 3-tonners, and ammunition was limited to the 100 rounds per gun carried on the Priests; and as they pushed along the Tiber they had virtually no information as to what was going on over the river. C Battery, pushing on through the Lothians on 16 June, had a sharp reminder of the enemy's presence across the water when a burst of shelling destroyed a Priest.

F Battery suffered heavily on the same day, when a sudden torrent of shelling fell in the yard that housed their command post, killing Gunners L. Lyon, D. E. Morris and F. Thomson and wounding Gunners Jones, Herbert, Heilig, Harrold and Darragh. The Padre, too, the Rev. H. W. M. Hearsey, was badly wounded that day, when the regimental aid post was hit by a shell, and it was two months before the Regiment welcomed him back from hospital.

When the Regiment did at length cross the Tiber, ten miles south of Perugia, it was to meet a stiff opposition. Demolitions, under heavy fire from enemy batteries, held up the advance. Major Rae, in action with 16/5 Lancers on the west bank, found a position from which he could observe these batteries. He immediately engaged them—and silenced them. Throughout the day the valuable information he passed back from his flank O.P. contributed greatly to the success of the advance.

The skill and offensive spirit with which Major Rae handled his guns had been noted many times before, both in North Africa and Italy: not least at Monte Grande in May. Now they were officially recognised by the award of the Military Cross.

By 20 June the enemy had evacuated Umbria's ancient capital, and were shelling the city, packed with troops, from high ground only 3000 yards away.

Life in the old Etruscan town, where F Battery retired for a short refit, was a revelation to troops who had not spent a night in comfort since first they left Cassino; to the Lothians particularly, who found in the stairway streets climbing between antique houses (which of course they called the Wynds), and in the atmosphere of the ancient university, many reminiscences of another capital set among the hills.

There were billets of almost epicurean comfort; picture houses, football, a local "vino" which earned enthusiastic approval, and a bustling small-city life which throbbed around the piazza, ringing with the clangs and hammerings of Brigade workshops; all shattered, at intervals, with the whistle of a shell, the scurryings for cover, and the thud and rumble as brickwork crumbled, in clouds of dust, under the impact of the enemy's high explosive. Gunner Yates, wounded, was among the casualties. Other units had a good many more.

Meanwhile 78 Division had been fighting a stubborn battle on the west of Lake Trasimene. At the beginning of July 1944 this Division were withdrawn, and 26 Armoured Brigade, taking their place in the battle, began another advance, hampered with enemy demolitions, contested here and there by heavy and accurate artillery fire and not unattended by casualties, which was to end in Arezzo and mark the beginning of a new phase, the crossing of the Arno river.

Last obstacle before Arezzo could be reached, Monte Lignano, just right of the Brigade's line of advance, imposed a 10 days' standstill.

It needed two infantry attacks before the feature could be cleared, with unspectacular artillery duels which nevertheless cost the Regiment a daily toll of casualties. These would have been far higher but for the G.P.O.s' cunning in hiding, and adroitness in shifting, their guns.

Twice on 5 July accurate enemy fire obliged C Battery to change position. They had one Priest knocked out by a direct hit, which mortally wounded Gunner E. Gent, and two ditched. D Battery lost two men killed and two wounded on the following day. On 7 July Lieut. Nigel Macmillan, going to relieve Lieut. R. F. V. Read, who was out on foot in support of 2 Rifle Brigade, was wounded in both arms and his O.P. Assistant, Gunner D. Veevers, killed. Gunner H. Turpin of F Battery was killed on the same day.

The Bishop of Lichfield buried the two gunners in the little village cemetery beneath the fortress of Montecchio.

There was vigorous retaliation for this succession of casualties. Despite the care with which the enemy's guns were concealed, despite the intricate pattern of the hills among which they lurked, the Regiment gave as good as they took, and they received a special note of thanks from the Rifle Brigade for the heavy defensive fire they put down night by night.

Bombers, scouring the mountain tops, sought out the enemy's gun positions and silenced several; but again on 9 June F Battery had a gun hit, Driver D. J. Jones (Signals) being killed and three men wounded; while on 10 July the R.E.M.E. workshop crew, trying to recover a vehicle under fire, had two killed and three wounded, including their commanding officer.

By 16 July the armour had won their way into Arezzo where, from a gun position in the town, F Battery fired 210 rounds in 12 minutes. Here the Arno winds in a great loop around the heights of Prato Magno; and Captain J. G. H. Banks of Y Troop, ever eager to thrust on, found his way—first of the Division—across the river, beating the leading tanks to it. As the Brigade moved north, mile by mile, each step taking its toll, Lance-Sergeant B. Preston was killed as a round of H.E. burst on a tree.

O.P. officers had to learn a new technique. Seldom, now, was it practicable for them to go forward in their tanks among the armour; more often, in this dogged advance, they directed their fire from the roofs of houses or from crannies among the hills, while between shoots the gunners gathered the early ripening fruits—peaches, plums, apples and pears; tomatoes, corn-on-the-cob (not to mention eggs galore)—as they passed through Arno's fertile valley.

The pace of the Army's advance was dictated not by caution but by demolitions; more cogent still, by the diversion of divisions to the south of France. It meant that there could be no reinforcement; no rest for the leading formations.

Nor was there any certainty that an area from which the Germans had retired was actually clear of the enemy. Bold snipers with machine-gun or bazooka lingered beside the line of advance, confident of escape, when they had done their work, through the mountainous forests. There was the halt, for example, south of Pontasieve. Only when the Regiment had passed through the village was it learned that a German sergeant, from a viewpoint in the church tower, had spent an afternoon making a panorama map of the British positions.

If there were any who felt frustrated at this slow progress, two events in July served to hearten them. The King was among his troops again; and three miles south of Arezzo—still under long-range fire—they lined the road to greet him, Lieut.-Colonel Barstow being personally presented to His Majesty, while Major Rae commanded 12 Regiment's contingent. There was a message, too, from General Alexander.

"Now we are completing an extensive regrouping in order to bring about the final collapse of the enemy . . . It is my intention to proceed with the second and perhaps final stage of the destruction of the German armed forces in Italy . . .

"Victory lies clearly ahead of us, but as good and experienced soldiers we know that the path is not an easy one, and final success can only be won by fighting for it . . . We shall continue as we have begun, to destroy the enemy wherever we find him and to march along the road to the last battle where final victory awaits us."

Throughout August, September and October 1944 short advances and static periods alternated.

Once past Florence the country became even more steep and less suitable for armour as the high mountain barrier was approached. The job of 6 Armoured Division was now merely to "lean on" the enemy while the big battle was being prepared and mounted on the east coast.

With every bridge and culvert blown, every road mined, and repairs so impeded by accurate long-range shell fire that work, for the most part, could be carried out only by night, it was a step-by-step business.

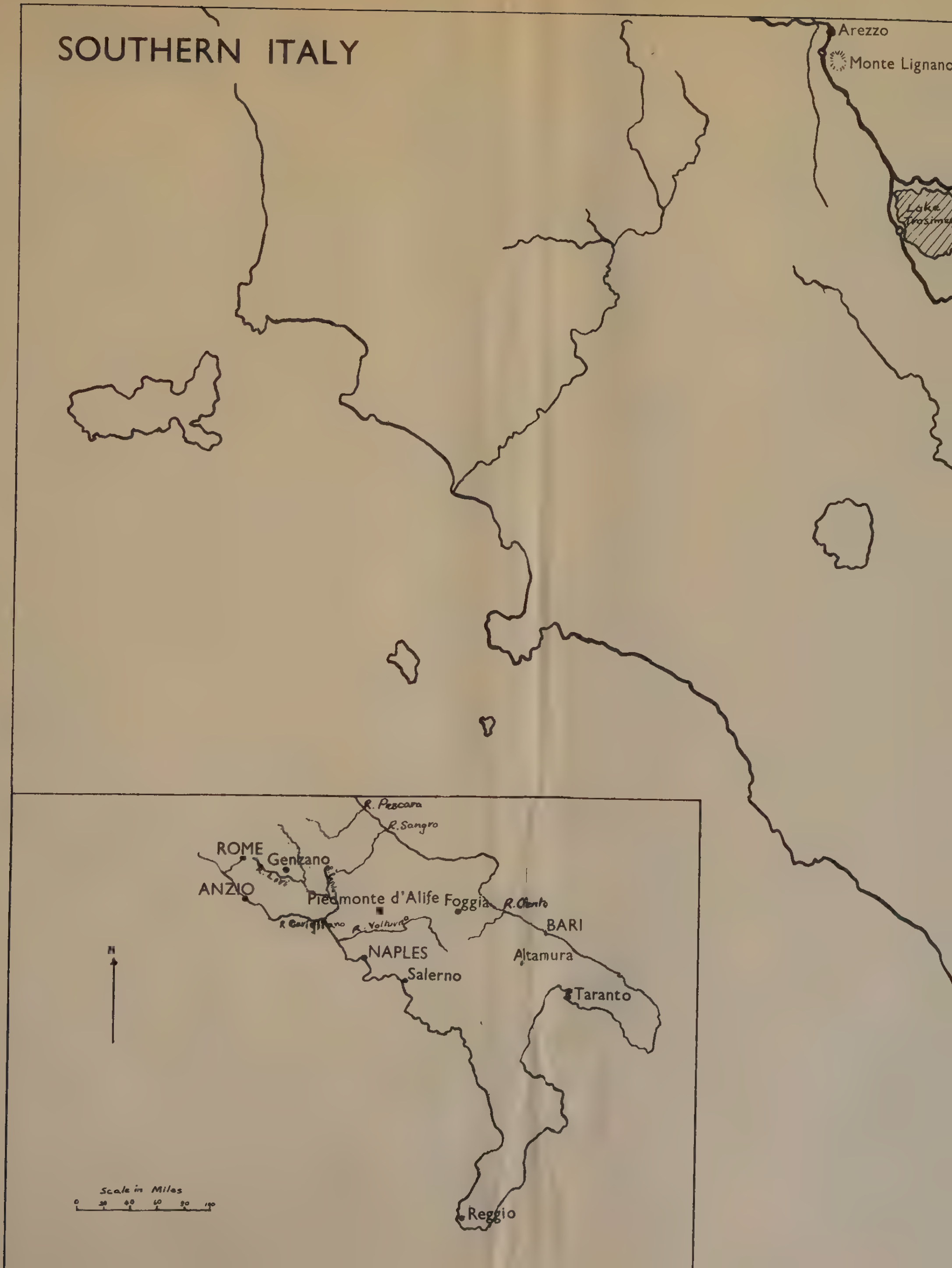
Where bulldozers could not repair the roads in time, gun detachments poised on mountain ledges had their rations brought up by mules, who alone could navigate the crumbling tracks. In one position each round had to be manhandled for a mile—the nearest any form of transport could get to the guns, once torrential rains, completing the wreckage the retiring enemy had left, had washed away the roads behind them.

Early in September the Regiment said a reluctant *au revoir* to their skilful and experienced Second-in-Command when Major Buttenshaw—recovering in a casualty clearing station from the oddest of active service mishaps, the crushing of his fingers in a too-abruptly-folding deck chair—learned that he had been appointed to command 142 Army Field Regiment R.A.; which he did with distinction, winning a D.S.O. Major S. N. Rae became Second-in-Command, Captain Gilbert taking over C Battery.

From the beginning of September until early December the Regiment had advanced only 50 miles, with a battery's tasks varying from 3000 rounds in a month to periods of a fortnight or more during which not one of the eight guns would fire a round.

For the O.P.s especially, poised on windswept crags, often without shelter of any kind, it was a trying time. High altitude rations were issued and the magic word "Rum" figured often in war diaries.

Though casualties were few, the Regiment did not pass unscathed through the now shattered Gothic Line, the sea-to-sea mountain rampart, from Rimini to Pisa, on which Hitler's hopes of saving northern Italy had been built. On 11 October, for instance, when a shell knocked out 17/21 Lancers' command post, three cavalry officers lost their lives, and with them Gunner R. A. J. Blackwell. Lance-Bombardier R. W. Griffin, operating his wireless in a White scout car, received a direct hit. Though slightly wounded and badly shaken, he moved to a nearby vehicle


SOUTHERN ITALY
Arezzo
Monte Lignan
Lake Trasime
R. Pescara
R. Sangro
ROME
Genzano
R. Liri
ANZIO
Piedmonte d'Alife
Foggia
R. Ofanto
BARI
R. Garigliano
R. Volturno
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Taranto
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Scale in Miles
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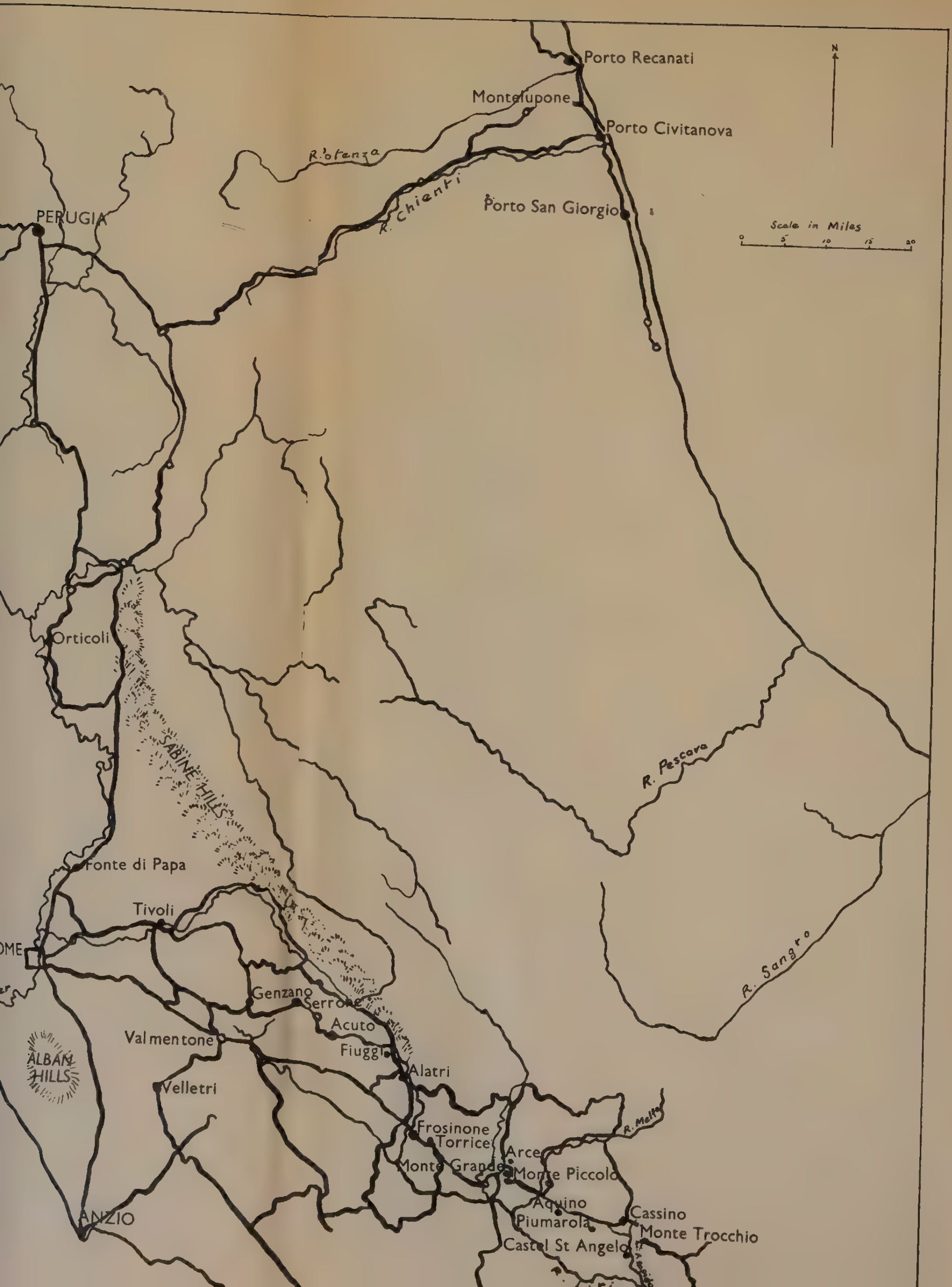
Porto Recanati
N
Montelupone
Porto Civitanova
R. Potenza
R. Chienti
Porto San Giorgio
PERUGIA
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Orticoli
SABINE HILLS
R. Pescara
Fonte di Papa
Tivoli
OME
R. Sangro
Genzano
Serrone
Acuto
Valmentone
Fiuggi
ALBAN HILLS
Alatri
Velletri
R. Melfa
Frosinone
Torrice
Arce
Monte Grande
Monte Piccolo
Aquino
Cassino
Piumarola
Monte Trocchio
ANZIO
Castel St Angelo

and reopened wireless communication without delay, earning a Military Medal for his dogged devotion.

It meant many days of frustrated effort; many of enforced idleness. But there were alleviations. Florence was cleared. Though Ponte Santa Trinita, Ponte Alle Grazie and Ponte Carraia lay shattered in the Arno, and the lovely Ponte Vecchio, last remaining bridge, was blocked with demolitions at either end, American bailey bridges soon spanned the river, and the quick influx of Army "amenities" made sightseeing trips possible from the Regimental Rest Camp which had been established at Arezzo; with celebrations of many honours earned in the past months and now gazetted—Military Crosses for Captains H. N. Atherton, J. G. Bagnall and J. G. H. Banks and Lieut. A. D. A. Newbery; Military Medals for Lance-Bombardier E. C. Howes of C Battery, Sergeant J. W. C. Hodkisson, Lance-Bombardier H. Dickinson and Gunner S. G. Searle of D, Sergeant C. Farnsworth of F.

14. BEFFANA

November 1944—*April* 1945

Two years, almost to a day, after their landing in North Africa, the Regiment, supporting the Rifle Brigade in the difficult mountain country around Castel Del Rio beneath Monte Taverna, were relieved on 9 November by 104 Regiment R.H.A.—less D Battery, who stayed in action until 23 November.

They gave expression to their buoyant feelings in a mammoth concert in the Opera House at Figlini, where the sketch "The Oliphant Boy of Firenze" (with sly digs at F Battery's popular Battery Sergeant Major) provoked storms of wise-cracks thick (in every sense) as the autumnal leaves that strow the brooks in neighbouring Vallombrosa.

Slow though their more recent moves had been, the Regiment had advanced 300 miles in six months of pretty constant fighting. Now they were to say good-bye, with many regrets, to their trusty war-horse the Priest. It had served them well: a good engine, a good track, a good weight of shell, a good air-burst, a good white phosphorous smoke for ranging.

Now they were back to the 25-pounder again: but self-propelled this time in the Canadian tank chassis known as the Sexton. It meant firing British ammunition instead of American shell paid for in dollars—with supply, moreover, so restricted that, in their last position, the Regiment had been cut down, by the demands of the troops now fighting in Normandy, to 10 rounds per day: a restriction quickly noted by the enemy, who, sure of little retaliation, stepped up their shelling accordingly.

There ensued, for 12 Regiment—still preoccupied with retraining layers on British sights and calibrating their new equipment—a period of Italian travel, a sort of military general post, which made it permissible to wonder whether Army Headquarters had not been suddenly staffed with womenfolk, exercising to the full the feminine propensity for changing their minds.

However, the first few weeks of the Regiment's rest-and-training spell gave no evidence of this. They were despatched to the

Adriatic coast and found themselves in the pretty walled village of Montelupone, south of Ancona; with a comfortable billet for every man.

The first two Sextons arrived on Christmas Eve; but investigation of the new armament had to wait for a day or two. Other things were afoot—a Christmas celebration, yes, of an outstanding kind; a New Year party for the sergeants in the Officers' Mess; but these were merely the *hors d'œuvres*. The event of the season was the children's party, which is still remembered, no doubt, as the highlight of Montelupone's history.

It is not Father Christmas or Santa Claus who, in rural Italy,[1] fills children's stockings with good things, but Beffana: a sterner patroness, for, unlike our tolerant benefactor, she only puts gifts in the stockings of the good ones. The naughty ones find, in the morning, just dirt and stones.

And she functions at Twelfth Night; for Beffana (who is really Epifania, the woman of the Epiphany) is the old woman who was too busy with household chores to go to her window to see the Magi as they passed her door on their way to Bethlehem. "I'll see them on their way back", she said. But the Three Wise Men went back another way; and ever since Beffana has stayed at watch all night looking out for them, and filling children's stockings to pass the time.

So when Major Douglas Hughes was detailed to lay on a party, in the village theatre, which should bear comparison with the primest junketings of Armoury House, it was R.S.M. Macleod[2] who, correctly attired as an aged crone, was cast for the principal part. A part of special importance: for most of Montelupone's children had never had an authentic Beffana. When the Fascists came into power, they adopted the festival and regimented it into a sort of "Strength Through Joy" party, employing one of Mussolini's blonde mistresses as high priestess.[3]

"Tables and forms were set down the length of the hall for the children. The boxes, which run all round the theatre in two tiers, were filled to overflowing with parents. Two boxes were used for service of relays of food and lemonade, presided over by the local schoolmarms, whose youth and beauty had added considerably to the zest of the volunteer helpers.

"H hour was scheduled for 1400 hours, and the rendezvous the village school. Shortly after this, the unforgettable spectacle of the approach march was seen: two columns, one moving in threes and led by the Regimental Sergeant Major, with the assistance of Battery Sergeant Majors Oliphant, Pearston and Faith, coming from the school; the other coming from the Asilo Infantile escorted by two Orderly Nuns, both converging from opposite sides of the square and crossing the start line dead on time.

"Our guests appeared to run very small this season, but were quite delightful, all in their best clothes and well-washed faces. So small were they that many had to be assisted to mount a form G.S., and only just had chin clearance.

"A substantial meal of sandwiches, cakes and lemonade was consumed. At length the management—confirmed by the advice of the schoolmarms—decided that 'they had had it', and tables were removed.

"The band, which had been working away valiantly, now turned to community singing. Douglas Hughes at the microphone made some spirited efforts to overcome the curse of Babel by making the announcements in Italian, the intensive brushing up which his Italian had lately received, and which had made him late for dinner so often during recent weeks, standing him in good stead. Lance-Bombardiers Calver and Yates as clowns, and Lance-Bombardier 'Pab' Turner as a strong man and barber's stooge, all did noble work.

"The climax of the afternoon came with the entrance of Beffana carrying a large sack of presents. The Regimental Sergeant Major, horrifically made up as a witch such as to scare any normal child into hysterics, made an effective entrance in a spotlight, and to an awesome roll of drums. The voice that remarked 'The old b——'s looking nicer than usual' was fortunately lost in the applause. Advancing to the front of the stage he descended a flight of steps towards the auditorium, the intention being that his distribution of presents should take place at the exit.

"Alas! there occurred the one hitch of the whole day. The steps proved unworthy of his 14 stone and the penultimate one collapsed, landing him base over apex at the bottom. After a moment of stunned silence, the children rose to their feet with a scream of joy and fell upon him, amid the helpless laughter of the

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OPPOSITE

13 Regiment

UPPER: *Lt.-Col. Daniell with Lieut. G. G. R. Hickes (I.O.).*

CENTRE: *Before entering Antwerp* (LEFT TO RIGHT) *Major Smyth-Osborne, Capt. A. S. Davies, Capt. H. W. D. Cottam, Capt. J. E. Nicoll, Major the O'Grady, Lieut. G. E. D. Boughtwood (R. C. of Signals).*

LOWER: *Major K. R. Farquhar, 2nd-in-C.*

lookers-on. He emerged without hat or wig, and as nearly shaken as a Regimental Sergeant Major can be, but his precious sack of sweets was inviolate, and with them he strode rather fiercely to the door.

"Two hundred excited Italian children, each determined to get at a sack of sweets, are quite a handful; but there were strong and resourceful men at work. Battery Sergeant Major Faith with a child under each arm, and other officers and N.C.O.s, for a few minutes bore a resemblance to King Herod's soldiery in a famous picture. After a minute or two of pandemonium a semblance of order was restored and the children were passed forward to receive their presents from an unruffled but hatless Beffana. Thence they passed through the door to a milling crowd of parents, each searching at the top of her voice for her offspring."

A fortnight after the party the first of 12 Regiment's many moves—which were eventually, with their battle manœuvres, to take them seven times across the Apennines—began.

The Regiment moved to San Giorgio, further down the coast; to Grottomare further still; then back across the Chienti river to Porto Recanati. They were getting so used to it that it was reckoned normal to do a move in the morning, play a game of soccer in the afternoon and hold a dance in the evening. Then back to Fonte Petrini, near Florence, once more, with a trip to Pontedera, near Pisa, for calibrating guns.

In April they were back on the Adriatic coast at Pesaro.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOURTEEN

[1] Beffana was much esteemed in rustic Germany too, in olden time.

[2] By the death in an accident of Regimental Sergeant Major D. S. Macleod, after he had left the Regiment on demobilisation, the H.A.C. lost one of their most remarkable characters. He was one of the very few pre-war members to serve right through in the ranks. An old Harrovian, he proved himself well able to hold his own, during the training years, with the toughest Regular N.C.O.s. Time and again he could have had a commission, but he always insisted that he was too old, and anyway much preferred to remain in the Regiment. His ambition was to be R.S.M. of an H.A.C. unit, and in North Africa he achieved it, with signal success.

[3] Thus Lieut.-Colonel Barstow, in a spirited account of the party contributed to the JOURNAL, from which this note is largely quoted.

OPPOSITE

13 REGIMENT

UPPER: *A Troop (No. 1, Sergt. Saunders) on the way to Antwerp.*

LOWER: *Norman Young's tank in Antwerp. His cap has gone, "souvenired" by his rejoicing (and pretty) passengers.*

15. LAST ROUND

April—October 1945

On 9 April 1945 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment began their last battle.

The Battle of the Senio—so it figures among the Regimental Honours—marked, for the Germans in Italy, the beginning of the end. It was fought, and fought fiercely, over country where the defence had manifest advantages.

Across 8 Army's line of advance ran a dozen or more parallel rivers—trickling watercourses in summertime; now swollen by the springtime into swirling torrents; so unimportant in peace that the majority of them figure neither in atlas nor in guidebook; so important in wartime that the crossing of each in turn cost its toll of lives.

Their flood banks rose 20 or 30 feet above the flat Romagna plain, whose orchards and olive groves were intersected by innumerable irrigation ditches. Each flood bank was a defence line, pitted with gun positions and dugouts difficult to locate and proof against shell fire.

In such country 6 Armoured Division could only remain in reserve, hoping to be unleashed so soon as the series of water obstacles had been forced. The guns of the Regiment, however, had an important part to play, both in the preliminary fire plans and in support of the infantry assaults.

As nearly as a unit of self-propelled Royal Horse Artillery can, 12 Regiment tip-toed into position near Bagnacavallo on the night 2/3 April, after a complicated night move from Pesaro.

Their deployment was an operation thrilling to watch. Guns were sited among farms hidden from air observation in piles of wood and haystacks; all track-marks obliterated; ammunition dumps tucked away under cover, until the G.O.C. 8 Indian Division, whom the Regiment were to support, was moved to admiration at the ingenuity with which Troop Leaders and Numbers One had stowed themselves away.

So minutely had the barrage been planned that when the signal came, at 1520 hours on 9 April, the opening lines, checked by air observation, were exactly "what the doctor" (in this case the C.R.A. Division) "ordered". He had only one correction to make, dropping one troop 50 yards: which, as he said later, he only did for "fancy work".

For eight hours the Regiment fired incessantly, till packings began to give, setting the fitters from the L.A.D. and the batteries a stiff task to keep the guns going. By noon on 10 April all was ready for a move forward to the bank of the Senio.

Reconnaissance parties had met the C.O. and Second-in-Command when disaster occurred. Eighteen American heavy bombers, dropping their loads too soon, covered the area with a carpet of H.E. and anti-personnel bombs, killing Lieut. G. N. Holbrook and Gunners D. C. Probert, P. R. Sketchley, H. Binnie and W. Young; wounding four more.

Casualties, serious enough also among the vehicles of 6 (D.C.O.) Lancers, would have been far worse had the Regiment's guns reached the riverside. Fortunately they had not. When they did they were able, in an all-day action, to give the Indian Lancers hearty support as, in their armoured cars, they routed out pockets of German resistance in villages and farms on the right of 8 Indian Division's advance.

It was noted with appreciation on this and the following days how aptly the Indian car commanders, many of them Viceroy-Commissioned Officers, got the hang of observation post work with its "Go west 300" type of correction, putting the guns on to targets which, in this close country, perhaps only one armoured car could see.

Ranges were getting long, and C Battery moved over the Senio to Maiano the better to support their new comrades as they crossed the Santerno.

On 15 April 2 New Zealand Division took up the advance.

By a last-minute decision of Higher Command, 12 Regiment were ordered to their support. It involved a forward and sideways move against time, across the advance and supply lines of two Corps—a technical achievement of which the Regiment had reason to be proud.

Having fixed a rendezvous for the guns, the C.O. and Second-in-Command set out, found New Zealand H.Q., received their admirably simple barrage trace, reconnoitred their map square. By the time this was done the advance parties had arrived and the guns moved into position without a halt. Task tables issued, they were ready to fire 15 minutes before H hour.

That very night the Regiment were called upon for another remarkable move—back across the Army's front in the dark to rejoin 6 Armoured Division in the unknown country around Bastia, ready for the breakout through the Argenta Gap.

Regimental groups had been formed again, a battalion of 61 Infantry Brigade being added to each armoured regiment. Throughout the battle, however, the guns were on 12 Regimental grid, handled centrally, till the last day, when the groups pushed on independently, each B.C. taking control of his own Battery.

Traghetto was reached on the night 19/20 April, and aided by the Regiment's fire 16/5 Lancers were able to crash through the village and fan out into the orchard and vineyard country beyond.

It was difficult going. Every mile or so there were ditches, canals, rivers, their bridges blown by the retreating Germans and the defiles mined. Shermans of the Armoured regiments, fitted with "Grousers", made light of most of these obstacles; but the O.P. tanks, with no such aids available, had to haul each other out, towing and leap-frogging as best they could, under hot fire from enemy guns, mortars and machine-guns still undisturbed on the farther bank of the River Reno.

It was an enormous help that the Desert Air Force, which had so tenaciously accompanied the Army from the Atlas nearly to the Alps, were able to provide the Regiment with the unaccustomed luxury of a whole flight of Air O.P.s. One aircraft per battery, operating on the battery wireless net, was often able to register in a few minutes, and shoot, a target which would have taken a troop commander an hour or more to locate.

Even so, there was much sniping. Captain Austin-Smith was wounded in the elbow by shrapnel when outside his tank; and the Battery Sergeant Majors and three-tonner crews who brought up the ammunition in pitch darkness through the rubble-strewn village, running the gauntlet of small arms fire, came in for much praise; Battery Sergeant Major Hunt's efforts in this respect earning him the Military Medal.

It was 17/21 Lancers' turn, on 21 April, to take the lead, Major Middleton, from his O.P. in a church tower, putting down concentrations to clear their path. A covey of six enemy tanks having been chased away by medium and heavy fire laid on by the Air O.P., they burst through to the main Florence–Venice road, Route 64, charging down the road in the failing light, firing right and left—at haystacks, tree clumps, every object that might conceal an enemy—unscathed by an 88-mm. battery still undislodged on the Reno bank 2000 yards away.

Captain Woodward, with C Squadron, had the satisfaction of bringing off a troop commander's dream when he saw, at long range, a column of German lorries in flight towards Ferrara. Map reference, estimate of speed, response from the Batteries, all went right. With a crash a Regimental concentration fell on the racing lorries; and Captain Woodward's reputation with 17/21 Lancers was assured.

A little later, however, he had a narrow escape at their hands: for a bullet from one of their tanks, following his own, carved a channel along the side of his skull above the left ear, with, fortunately, no damage more than skin deep. Following up hard, F Battery had a Sexton blown up on that peculiarly dangerous device, one Teller mine placed on top of another. The vehicle was badly damaged and two men wounded.

It was a day of very hard fighting; for though the rot was beginning to set in and prisoners were surrendering to both cavalry and their supporting batteries, determined bazooka men and tanks still offered a stout resistance here and there. 2 Lothians, advancing with D Battery close to Bondeno, penetrated into the village. One of their tanks crossed the bridge—and was followed by two Tiger tanks which destroyed it and blew the bridge.

At one time, when they had lost no fewer than eight tanks, C Squadron of the Lothians were only linked to their Regimental Commander by D Battery's O.P. tank, which had stepped into the breach, conveying messages through Battery headquarters.

The Lothians' advance had brought them by 23 April as far as the Po, where D Battery's O.P. had "an enjoyable day" bringing down fire on boats and ferries in which the now fugitive Germans were trying to cross the broad stream. Meanwhile 16/5 Lancers had reached Finale dell Emilia, with C Battery in attendance taking on targets on the far side of the river.

That evening the Regiment concentrated at Porporana, west of Ferrara, to support the crossing of the Po by 1 Guards Brigade. It was their last action position in the war. During the night the Guards crossed the great river.

26 Armoured Brigade and 12 Regiment, to their exasperation, were held back. All else was to give priority now—in river cross-

ings, in petrol allotment—to New Zealand Corps, in their dash for Trieste to forestall Tito. The Sappers laid a pontoon bridge across with remarkable speed; the Guards established a ferry apt for wheeled vehicles. Lieut.-Colonel Barstow pleaded with General Freyberg, but he was adamant; nothing was to cross until his whole Corps were through.

Only Captain John Kirk, with D Battery's O.P.s, managed to get over, having been ordered to support the Derbyshire Yeomanry, whom they accompanied across the Adige and round to Udine, right up to the spot where the German armies in Italy and Austria surrendered. Having no guns of his own, each night Captain Kirk would tour the towed-artillery Regiments, getting their frequencies and permission to use their guns. Only when it was all over did these prodigal sons return to their envious unit. Change "Babylon" for "Emilia", and the Psalmist's words almost fitted: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept."

If they did not actually weep, the Regiment were deeply disappointed, after so long a hunt, not to be in at the kill: but the news came on 2 May of the complete enemy surrender, and V.I. evening was celebrated by a battle royal of fireworks, provided by a handy dump of enemy Verey lights.

More soberly, the Regiment held their service of thanksgiving, and read, chief of the sheaf of congratulatory letters, the King's message to their Army Group Commander, General Mark Clark, and that good comrade's graceful reply, memorable as long as Anglo-American friendship lasts for its opening words:

> "With my humble duty I thank your Majesty personally and on behalf of all those sailors, soldiers and airmen whom I have the honour to command, for your very gracious message which is deeply appreciated."

Five days later the Regiment were on the move into Austria. In the summer paradise of Carinthia, on the pastured banks of the Wörther See, they returned to their earliest wartime tasks, the guarding of Vulnerable Points.

This time they were more obviously vulnerable. Marshal Tito's army of Yugoslavs, uncertain yet where they "got off", were roaming the country: to be gently but firmly restrained from establishing themselves. There were German prisoners to guard in the great camp at Viktring; Hungarians, Graziani Italians, White Russians, Chetnik Croats and Slavs to be sorted out, and with them the unfortunate forced labourers of every Central European nationality—the multi-racial flotsam and jetsam of war.

In the picturesque valley of the Gurk, the Regiment's next halting place, there were 3600 horses, belonging to a Cossack Regiment that had fought on the German side, to be taken over.

Harking back a few years the Batteries became, unofficially at all events, horsed again; and 1 July saw a real old-style gymkhana, with Brigadier T. C. Usher and Lieut.-Colonel M. C. Hamilton-Campbell judging, and Lieut.-Colonel Barstow on his bay mare Greta, Major Douglas Hughes on his chestnut gelding Damerino and newly-promoted Lieut. Oliphant on his bay mare Fortune, going round the jumps with 25 others on mounts whose new names derived, some from Ruff's Guide, some from the war maps on which the Regiment's campaigns were traced—Daddy Long-legs and Starlight, Fondouk and Firenze; the Padre's black gelding Gustav, coaxed into the unfamiliar manœuvres of musical chairs; Major Gilbert on his enormous Mexican Pete, unbeaten at wrestling on horseback. It might almost have been an English summer day: for rain stopped play before all the events could be decided.

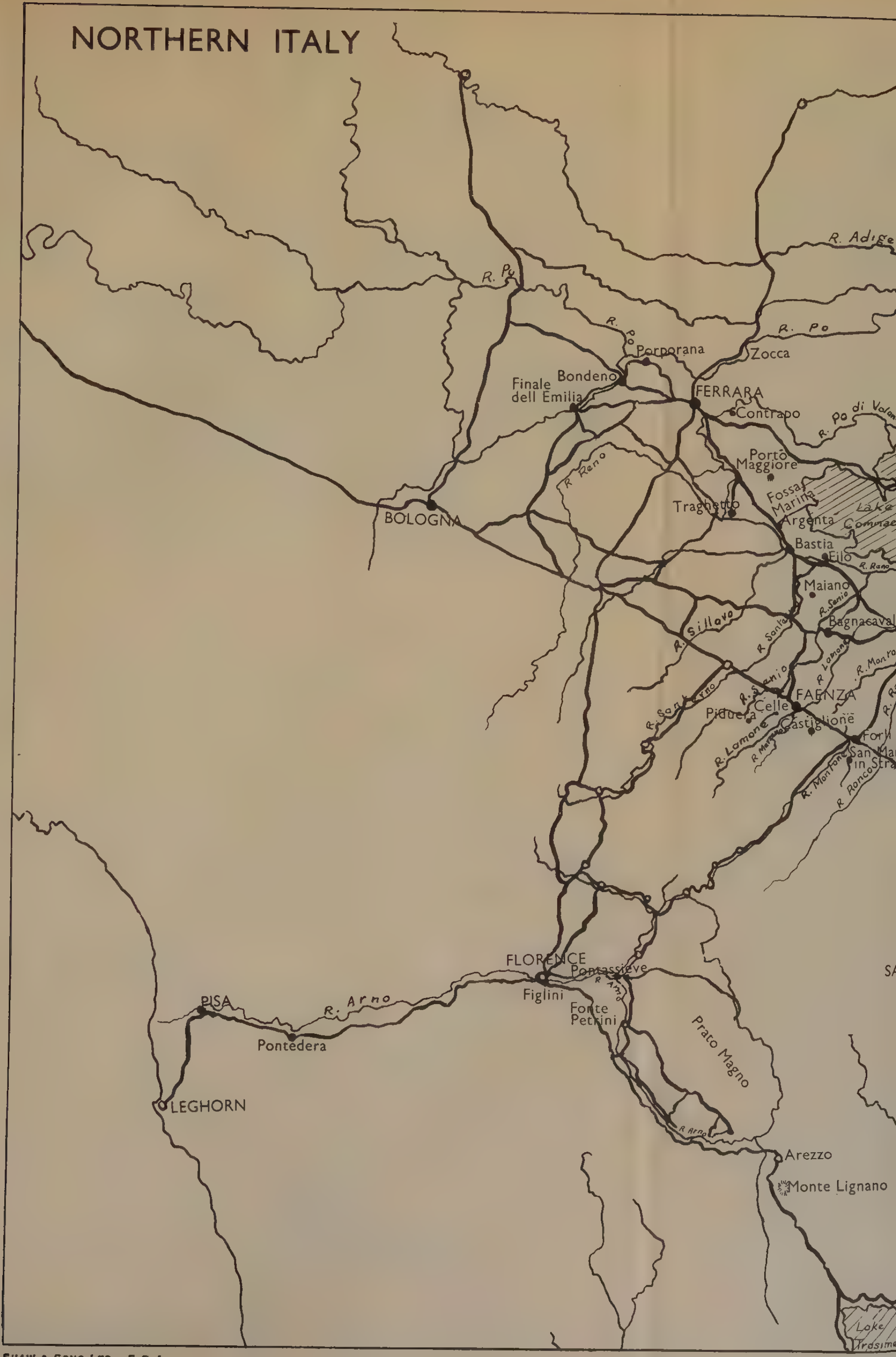
Nor was the sudden change back to equestrianism without its casualties. There is mention in the "war" diary—now so inaptly named—of not a few revered figures posted to hospital as a sequel to what is brutally stated as "falling off a horse". They shall remain anonymous.

First-class trout fishing, bathing in river and lake, shooting of buck and deer, cricket and later football, made up a holiday as heartily enjoyed as it had been well earned; one whose pleasures, indeed, had to be soft-pedalled a little as, with ever-widening home leave, officers and men rejoined for a spell their folks in Britain, to whom such joys were but pre-war memories.

Some few well-known figures departed for further service with 8 Indian Divisional Artillery in the Far East—Captain Pirie, Captain Forestier-Walker, Lieuts. Frost, Chudleigh and Carmichael.

Then came a posting which awakened the Regiment to the realisation that their fine history was drawing to a close. Via Milan and Athens ("See the world at the King's expense") Lieut.-Colonel Barstow was posted home on release. Throughout all but a month of the Regiment's war service he had been their fighting leader. Under his command they had earned their laurels.

Already it had been announced that the Regiment would be merged with 11 Regiment, on their arrival from Italy, under Lieut.-Colonel Slade-Powell; and on 24 October 1945 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. were re-absorbed into the Regiment from which they had sprung; bringing, for the future colours of the Honourable Artillery Company, battle honours well worthy of their place on the silken scrolls.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R. Reno
Porto Maggiore
Fossa Marina
Lake Commac
Traghetto
Argenta
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Filo
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BOLOGNA
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Celle
Piduera
Castiglione
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R. Marzeno
Forli
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R. Ronco
FLORENCE
Pontassieve
Figlini
R. Arno
Fonte Petrini
Prato Magno
PISA
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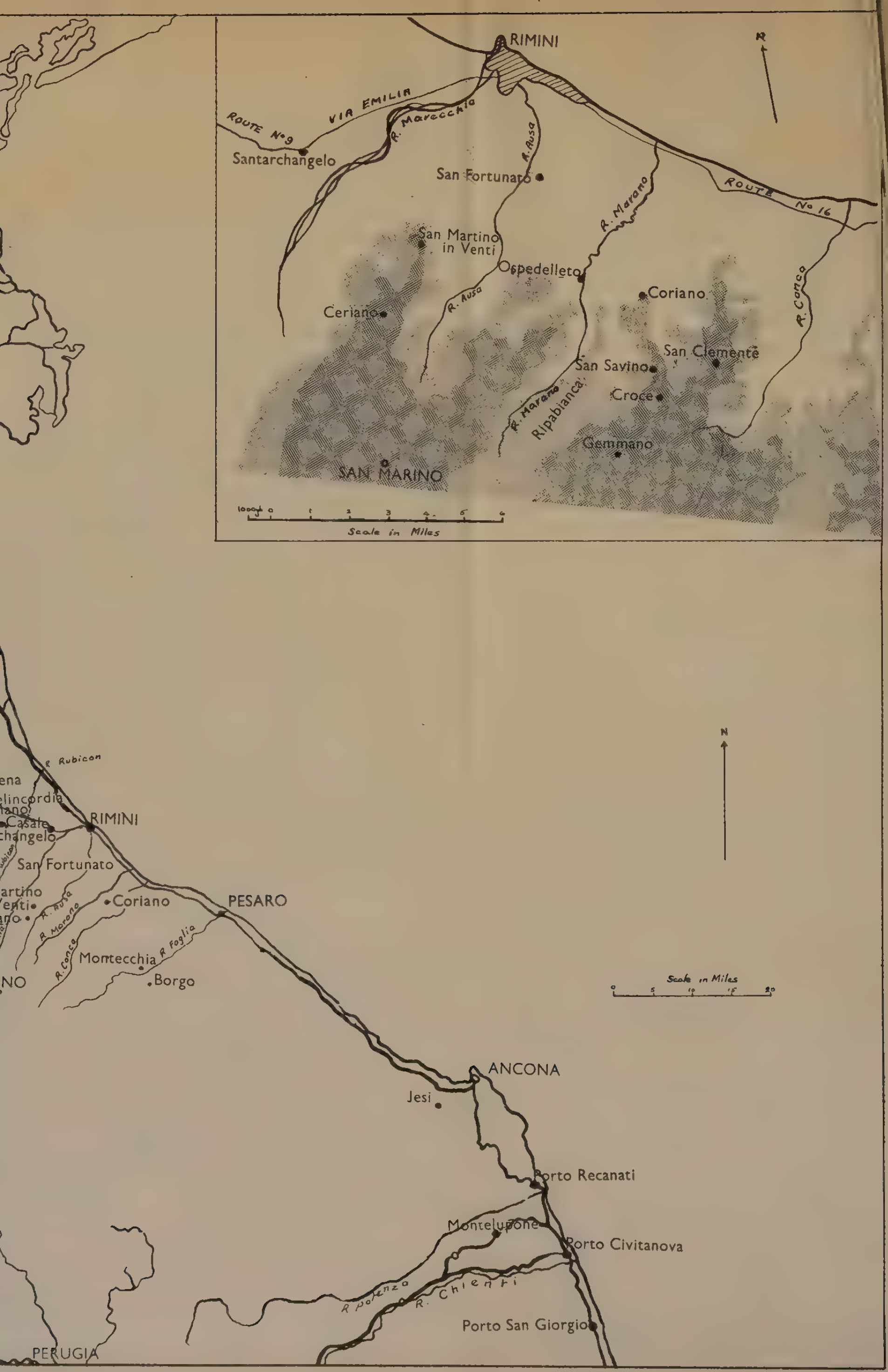
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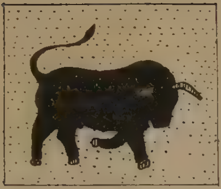


13 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT R.H.A.

1. THE REGIMENT IS BORN

13 *November* 1940—12 *June* 1944

IF pride of regiment stands for anything—and the history of the British Army would suggest that it does—then the unknown individual who decreed that the unit formed on 13 November 1940 should be called 13 (H.A.C.) Regiment Royal Horse Artillery deserved well of his country.

There was no very cogent reason why they should be called an Artillery Regiment, except that another Artillery Regiment was required. The few hundreds of raw recruits who were first gathered into their fold—many of them labourers from Manchester and Liverpool, with a high proportion over thirty years of age—were as innocent of the procedure for loading a piece of ordnance as they were of trooping the Colour.

Nor had they, in origin, any very tangible connection with the Honourable Artillery Company. True, a handful of officers and N.C.O.s could be squeezed out of 12 Regiment, themselves in process of becoming a unit. But thanks to the foresight of the past four hundred years, which had decreed that Gentlemen of the Artillery Garden should be available, in time of need, to officer the country's citizens whenever they might be called to arms, there were few Army units, new or old, which had not among their officers some, at all events, who had learned their drill at Armoury House.

However, such was the decree; and such was the leaven, that long before 13 Regiment embarked for active service overseas their officers had come to regard Armoury House as their spiritual home, and all ranks had linked themselves to the traditions of the ancient Company whose renown they were destined worthily to maintain and whose battle honours they would in due time enrich.

Thus there were drafted, in the Regiment's earliest days, five officers from 12 (H.A.C.) Regiment—Major E. A. Mortleman, Captains G. G. Hodges and R. C. Rowland-Clark and 2/Lieuts. P. C. A. Hawkins and A. S. Davies (of whom the last named was to serve with 13 Regiment throughout their war history) with three warrant officers, three sergeants and some thirty gunners.

From their birthplace in Denbigh the Batteries—assembled as a Regiment for the first time—moved in March 1941 to the West Riding to join 11 Armoured Division, with whom their fortunes were thereafter to be linked. The only outstanding event of their journey was the fact that I Battery's petrol lorry ran out of petrol.

Regimental H.Q. was at Glusburn. The Batteries were dotted around the westward edge of Ilkley Moor; not "baht 'at", for they were complete as to uniform, but "baht" most of the equipment a Royal Horse Artillery Regiment requires. Little wonder that, when they marched through Ilkley during War Weapons Week, the inhabitants responded by producing a higher contribution per head than any town in the country.

If, for the development of a scratch mob into an efficient Regiment, some credit is due to the unknown godfather who named them, how much more is due to the officers under whose guidance the Regimental spirit was born and fostered!

For three years the Regiment were commanded by Lieut.-Colonel H. C. ("Chink") Phipps. Under him, with Captain "Bunny" Davies as his Adjutant, the Regiment lived through the enthusiastic months when training was exciting and each new item of equipment a fresh wonder; through the months when interest waned with repetition, and efficiency verged on staleness; when sister units overseas were earning laurels and stay-at-homes wondered if their turn would ever come.

To them, and to the officers—fortunately, a high proportion—who "grew up" with the Regiment this achievement is mainly due: that when Lieut.-Colonel R. B. T. Daniell, D.S.O., took over command from Lieut.-Colonel (later Brigadier) Phipps, he inherited a Regiment who knew their job and were on their toes, and were knit together by long months of comradeship.

For 13 Regiment were not called upon to face the trials which 11 and 12 Regiments had endured in their early days. There were no new Regiments to be "budded off." The constant combing of the ranks, for potential officers for other units, little affected 13 Regiment, with their far smaller proportion of experienced men. Thus when Lieut.-Colonel Daniell took his Regiment overseas, he had fifteen officers under his command who had been with the unit for more than three years, and the average service of officers was 28 months with the Regiment.

But overseas service was yet far ahead. June 1941 found the Regiment further north at Hovingham, near Ampleforth, where the Howardian Hills begin to slope down to the North Riding dales. There they were brought to full strength of 25-pounder guns; and so excited were they that a sub-section of I Battery, discharging blank on the village green to mark another War Weapons Week, fired at 7000 yards instead of 11,000; thereby endangering an apple tree and giving one spectator hysterics. The sub-section were made to walk the missing 4000 yards (and back) the next day to mark the need for greater precision.

11 Armoured Division made their first public appearance as a formation in September 1941—an occasion illuminated by the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry, one of whose enthusiasts set his 3-ton Leyland petrol lorry on fire by incautiously looking for a fault with a lighted hurricane lamp.

Exercise Percy, in October, was marred by the Regiment's first casualties, when two men, Gunners W. R. Buchanan and W. Lockett, were killed through walking on a land mine—in an area clearly marked.

On 5 November a message was received giving the Division twenty-four hours to prepare for inspection by an "Important Person"; and under the twinkling eyes of Mr. Winston Churchill I Battery took part, next day, in a mock battle, firing eight rounds blank per gun; nor did the Prime Minister's popularity suffer when, walking down the line of guns, he spoke, in the hearing of all, the magic words: "The Royal Horse Artillery, the Right of the Line and the Terror of the World".

He asked to see an armour-piercing shot, which was handed to him—a nice clean one—by the delighted Sergeant McGill, No. 1 of C Sub-section, E Troop; and after his departure each unit recorded in their war diary this telegram:

> "I am very glad to have seen this grand Division which General Hobart has trained so well. I hope a chance will come for it to play a glorious part in the destruction of a hateful enemy. Friday will be a whole holiday.
>
> Winston Churchill."

Training, now that equipment was fully available, had become so absorbing that a genius in 11 Support Group devised a chart for each Battery to keep—a sheet six feet by three, covered with coloured marks to shew that every man was receiving his instructional due. "It takes the Battery Clerk the whole afternoon to fill up", commented Major J. F. Murphy, then commanding I Battery, in his war diary; adding, characteristically: "The quickest way, however, of finding out what a man is doing is still to ask the Sergeant Major."

Comradeship developed with plentiful sport and, when occasion offered, abundant conviviality. Both were in evidence when, on Boxing Day, the Regiment held a seven-a-side Rugby tournament —and abandoned the last game when they saw a stoat chasing a weasel across the pitch. Or did they?

There was boating, too, on Hovingham Lake, in borrowed landing craft (truly foreshadowing a job the Regiment would have to do time and again in war). Whether this should be classed as training or sport was regarded as a moot point; but the lesson did remain that the command "Right hand down" does not produce the same result in aquatic navigation as in the driving of a vehicle impelled by internal combustion.

Another move in May 1942 brought the Regiment to an old H.A.C. hunting ground, Gomshall in Surrey. In more serious vein they tested their prowess at practice camps at Larkhill and Builth Wells.

Returning from the former, Lieut. Kenneth Vere managed to buckle the wing of the Daimler in which, for some municipal purpose, the Mayor and Aldermen of Southampton were proceeding to the House of Lords. The incident was not recorded with the contrition that might have been expected. Instead the war diary remarked, rather impudently perhaps, that it would not have occurred had these worthies gone by train; adding, in the phrase of the times, the query "Was your journey really necessary"?

Tank driving alternated with gunnery in the training programme, and cost the Regiment a good man when in April Lance-Bombardier J. Moran was killed practising with the Westminster Dragoons.

Exercises followed in quick succession; one of the toughest being Tiger, in May, when active service austerity was insisted on (no food to be bought) and the traffic jams were formidable. "Some of the lanes", the war diary remarks, "were a good bit wider at the end of the exercise than at the beginning."

Whether the Mayor's journey was really necessary or not, practice camps certainly were: for not every troop were yet adept at the art of gunnery. There was the awkward moment in Wales when, firing live ammunition by map reference, a Gun Position Officer measured switch and range to the observation post instead of to the target, and landed a round ten yards from his troop commander and twenty yards from the Divisional Commander. Nobody was hurt, but the unfortunate subaltern was sent home.

Crowborough and Brandon in turn witnessed the Regiment's progress towards battleworthiness: then Fulbourn, near Cambridge. On nearby Newmarket Heath the Regiment stood in the pouring rain, on 6 January 1943, for inspection by the Duke of Gloucester; and nineteen days later, in the Leys School football ground, they paraded before their Captain General, the King. Under His Majesty's eye Lieut. Tony Hodgson interpreted oblique photographs, and H truck staff worked out a barrage. A highly coloured fighting map shewed Girton College as the objective. "Jolly good place to attack", commented His Majesty.

February 1943 brought the news the Regiment had been waiting for. They were to proceed to Barry and Birkenhead for embarkation. Bitter disappointment followed as the orders were cancelled, and Battery officers set themselves anew to the task of combating boredom and keeping their men on their toes. Still the Gunners' motto *Ubique* was their watchword as they ranged from Otterburn to Lydd, to Wootton, to Welbeck, to Kirkcudbright, with regular visits, for anti-tank training, to Foulness Island, a place which one commentator considered "most appropriately named". There was a long spell, in June 1943, at Driffield among the Yorkshire Wolds.

Here Lieut.-Colonel "Chink" Phipps, now appointed C.R.A. of the Guards Armoured Division, said *au revoir* to the Regiment which for three years he had created and commanded. Lieut.-Colonel R. B. T. Daniell, D.S.O., succeeded him in command.

Sextons arrived, with Canadian instructors to teach the Regiment a new skill and a new language. One Battery Quartermaster Sergeant was badly shaken when, on an exercise, a Canadian umpire asked if his truck had been gassed yet. It took a puzzling minute to discover he was asking about petrol.

On 8 February 1944 the Regiment found themselves at Beverley racecourse, under the stern eye of the Commander who, before long, was to lead them to victory. The Regiment knew little, at first hand, of General Montgomery. Their early reactions were curious; at first, almost hostile, and then . . . An informal comment in a war diary can best explain:

> "He fixed us all with a very hard, sinister, penetrating stare in order, as he told us afterwards, to size us up and decide if he could rely on us . . . The soldiers don't care much for his poses and postures . . . They were all impressed by his speech, in spite of themselves. All who have served under him tell us that his popularity grows when all ranks find out in battle the immense care and forethought the General gives to any task he sets them."

Once again—at Driffield on 22 March—the Regiment paraded before the King. The Queen and Princess Elizabeth were with His Majesty as he ran an affectionate eye over the Divisional Artillery. There was a feeling abroad that it could not be very long, now . . .

On 12 June the Regiment's turn came. At the London docks they embarked, G Battery in a British Landing Ship, Tanks; H and I in American craft of the same kind.

2. THE STRUGGLE FOR CAEN

15 *June*—10 *July* 1944

It was too late a moment for doubt, too early for exultation, when on D Day plus 9, 15 June 1944, 13 (H.A.C.) Regiment disembarked from their landing ships on the westward edge of Juno beach at Graye-sur-Mer, just by the mouth of the River Seulles; a spot known to an enlightened few in pre-war days for its sandy beach and its oysters.

There were anxious frowns in some quarters, though General Montgomery's Headquarters was not among them.

All the way westwards along the Normandy coast, from the airborne *pied-à-terre* east of the Orne to deep into the base of the Cherbourg peninsula, the Allied beachheads were linked into a lodgement ten to twenty miles deep. The Mulberry harbour at Arromanches was all but complete. Rommel's main Panzer forces, the flower of the Hitler Youth, were locked in battle with Second Army before Caen, the hinge of a great gate which, before long, Bradley's American Army would swing open.

"My policy", General Montgomery wrote on 11 June, "is to pull the enemy on to Second Army so as to make it the easier for First Army to expand and extend."

But Caen, marked down in the plan for capture on D Day, was not yet in British hands. Though H.M.S. *Nelson* and H.M.S. *Ramillies* were to put a 15-inch or 16-inch shell into the shattered, historic little city every thirty seconds throughout the night of 12/13 June, amid and around the rubble of its ancient streets German Panzers and infantrymen still maintained a resolute stand.

Anxious though they were over this stubborn defence, Supreme Allied Headquarters were far less worried than Rommel. While naval and shore guns battered his front, the Allied Air Force dominated the country in overwhelming strength for sixty miles behind his line, so that reinforcements, moving to his aid, suffered casualties in vehicles and men as grave as they might have met in battle.

Nor could he expect aid from the German armies massed in the north. With towed balloons and metal "window" strips dropped from aircraft, Allied Air Command were simulating the crossing of another invasion force across the Narrow Seas.

In the face of this threat, the Germans dared not move their divisions from the Pas de Calais; the more so as they guarded there the launching sites of the V1 buzz-bombs which, in a day or two, were to lay London in ruins. In any event, it would not have been easy to send them to Rommel's aid, for every bridge over the Seine, from Paris to the sea, was shattered.

Nevertheless, Caen had not fallen: and now two fresh Panzer Corps, toughened by hard fighting on the Russian front, were hurrying north from Alençon as fast as air-smitten roads and wrecked bridges would let them, with Hitler's orders to sweep the British into the sea. These forces must be met and pinned down before they could turn west to oppose the advancing Americans. This was to be the first task of the newly landed VIII Corps.

For ten days, while that Corps assembled, 13 Regiment and the rest of 11 Armoured Division, having landed dryshod, stayed not far from the coast, troubled only by "overs" or anti-aircraft shell, one of which caused their first war casualty, an arm injury to one of the cooks.

Two hours after dawn on 26 June, 15 (Scottish) Division, with 31 Armoured Brigade, moved southward into their first battle under a lowering sky. Air cover, for the first time in the Normandy battle, was on a minor scale, for airfields in Britain were shrouded in thick mist. All morning the Regiment's F.O.O.s had been shooting not only 13 Regiment but most of the Corps Artillery, and indicating targets for Typhoon rocket-firing planes. At 1130 hours they advanced with the armour to St. Mauvieu.

The close country—cornland dotted with coppices and woods—was thick with snipers whom the infantry had not had time to mop up. Here the Regiment suffered their first fatal casualty, when Lieut. E. A. Barson (already wearing the Military Medal ribbon for previous war service) was killed as he stood by his director carrying out a survey.

OPPOSITE

13 Regiment

1. A village patrol. 2. Last bivouac before crossing the Rhine. 3. Women snipers—"the Lustwaffe girls"—rounded up. 4. Captured German 2-man submarine—just three months too late for the fair.

It was a hotly contested advance, and by dusk on the second day the guns were still in action at St. Mauvieu, with the armour just forward around Cheux. Enemy shell fire now began to take its toll. G Battery lost the Battery Commander's tank, though Major Gaunt and his crew escaped injury, but Lance-Sergeant P. Willis was killed and Captain Gotz and the rest of his crew wounded when theirs was hit. An 88-mm. A.P. shell, penetrating Lieut. Mather's tank (H Battery), passed between his legs close enough to leave a slight burn on each, but doing him no other injury. One of his crew was killed.

The day which brought them their first experience of enemy shelling also brought 13 Regiment their first decoration. E Troop were in action near St. Mauvieu when a stray A.P. shell went through the front of C Sub's S.P. and into the engine compartment, killing the No. 1, Sergeant V. D. McGill, Bombardier J. Hallinan and Gunner J. W. Cawte.

At once Gunner L. F. Adams dashed into the burning vehicle, and for five minutes, with ammunition exploding around him, struggled to rescue the crew. Only when an officer ordered him to abandon the hopeless task did Adams leave the wrecked gun. He was rewarded with the Military Medal.

At first light on 28 June the batteries moved forward, one by one, till they faced the high ground between Evrecy and Esquay, stiff with dug-in enemy tanks and anti-tank guns. There for two days they were in action of increasing intensity, firing some 400 rounds per gun: and I Battery lost two men—Gunners A. F. Edmonds and P. O'Malley—when an A.P. shell struck the Command Post.

Forward across the Odon with 3 Royal Tank Regiment, Captain Kinnersley was trying to neutralise, with aircraft rockets and artillery concentrations, a group of enemy tanks on the wooded Hill 112. Only from 200 yards distance could he get the view he required—so close that the red smoke, borne towards him on a southerly wind, covered his O.P. He had, indeed, placed himself within the aircraft attack zone; and there he stayed until the enemy tanks were driven out and the hill captured.

OPPOSITE 86 REGIMENT

UPPER: *One that missed. D Troop beside a Flying Bomb crater in Holland.*

LOWER: *274 Battery Sergts. at Waemunster, Belgium.* FRONT: *Bates, Hubbard, Price.* MIDDLE: *Dwight, Keefe, B.S.M. Wyatt, B.S.M. Shepherd, B.S.M. Riches, Lowe, Manning.* BACK: *Moffatt, Williams, Norwood, Bray, Bodycombe, Malpas, Barclay.*

Mopping-up operations followed; a wood had to be put in a state of defence. Accompanying motorised infantry, detailed for this task, he continued as F.O.O. to bring down defensive fire, disregarding heavy shelling around him. His wireless set was smashed, his operator wounded. He saw to the man's evacuation, collected another set, and returned to his O.P.

For some time, accurate fire from Panzers made it impossible to get observation from his tank. With Gunner A. Shaw, his spare operator, he crawled to a hilltop with his wireless set. All his crew were wounded. Gunner Shaw, refusing himself to be evacuated, gave first aid to his comrades and carried on.

A heavy shell damaged Captain Kinnersley's tank. Learning that fitters could not be got to him to repair it till after dark, he got out and started to repair it himself with shells and mortar bombs falling continuously around him. He was himself wounded. Even then, though in great pain, he saw his men evacuated before he would accept medical aid. Thus Captain Kinnersley earned the Regiment's first Military Cross; and Gunner Shaw received the Military Medal.

That night the armour was moved back while an infantry attack was put in to secure the flank. The guns remained and, observing for the whole Divisional Artillery, drove back a counter-attack by Tiger tanks, Panzers and infantry by fire so abundant that it almost made up for the air support the weather had denied.

Five days after the action began, the Regiment were moved back, hoping for a few hours' sleep—but at 2200 hours they were in action again at St. Mauvieu, coming in for a good deal of shelling from the Carpiquet airfield on their left flank. Lieut. Alan Stanford, who had just succeeded Lieut. Barson as C.P.O. of G Battery, was killed with two of his men, Gunners F. S. Morriss and H. W. T. Percival, and several men were wounded.

There was to be no rest for the Germans around Caen, and none for the guns which were harrying them. Eight times in fourteen days the Regiment were moved; while the Canadians attacked Carpiquet and its airfield.

Meanwhile, following a 2560-ton bombing raid, I Corps battered away at the rubble-strewn fringe of Caen. Hill 112, across the Odon, retaken in the Germans' counter-attack, was stormed again by 43 Division beneath a barrage in which the Batteries fired 350 rounds per gun.

3. BOURGUEBUS RIDGE

16—20 *July* 1944

Caen, all but the southern factory suburb of Vaucelles, was now in General Montgomery's grip; but new German infantry divisions were arriving. As they arrived, Panzer divisions whom they replaced would be available to slip westwards, to slam the door which General Bradley's American Army was waiting to push open.

Hence Operation Goodwood, the armoured thrust to the east of Caen, which, as General Montgomery signalled to General Eisenhower, would set the Normandy front aflame. Those Panzer divisions must "go west", but in a figurative, not a literal sense. VIII Corps, with 11, 7 and the Guards Armoured Division moving together in one sweep, must pin them down, while on either flank 3 Division kept the ring and 3 Canadian Division cleared the southern suburbs of Caen.

Batteries joined their Regimental groups and moved, on the nights 16/17 and 17/18 July, to their hiding place and start line north-east of Caen.

It was a nightmare march. The dust clouds which covered the battlefield settled, in the dew, into a paste that covered men and vehicles, penetrating even the inside of tanks as they moved in the dark across the Orne and the Caen canal.

At dawn on 18 July the R.A.F. poured upon the German forces, either side of the corridor down which VIII Corps were to pass, a deluge of bombs never before seen in war. As the last aircraft swerved away 11 Armoured Division moved south behind a rolling barrage with 29 Armoured Brigade in the van; 3 Royal Tanks leading, followed by H Battery and a company of 8 Rifle Brigade. Then followed Brigade H.Q., with Lieut.-Colonel Daniell and Captain Davies; behind them 2 Fife and Forfar with I Battery, and 23 Hussars with G Battery.

At the railway which leads through Troarn to Pont l'Evêque the column was to divide: the Guards taking on the enemy strongpoint at Cagny, which lay athwart their path; 7 Division striking south and 11 Armoured Division swinging half right at the next railway crossing—the line to Lisieux—and heading for Bourguebus.

Thus far all went well. Dazed German infantry on either side of the corridor waited in their shelters until the flanking divisions routed them out.

But Cagny, reduced to rubble though it was, was not reduced to impotence. Half a dozen 88-mm. guns and some Tiger tanks had survived the bombing—guns which outranged anything the Armoured Brigade possessed—and were already giving the advancing columns a hot reception, unpleasant for the Sextons and armoured half-tracks, doubly so for the only "soft stuff"—the M.O.'s 15-cwt. truck and the ambulance he brought with him.

To counter this menace the Fife and Forfar, with I Battery, came up on the left of the leading group. Within a few moments all but three tanks of the leading squadron were hit and brewed up. I Battery swung right and came into action just south of the railway line. As they opened fire snipers from the cornfields and hedges and ditches all around opened fire too.

It was, indeed, ideal country for the German armour with their long-range weapons; open, and with few hedges. It meant that the Panzers and Tigers could brew up Shermans at ranges like 3000 yards without fear of effective retaliation.

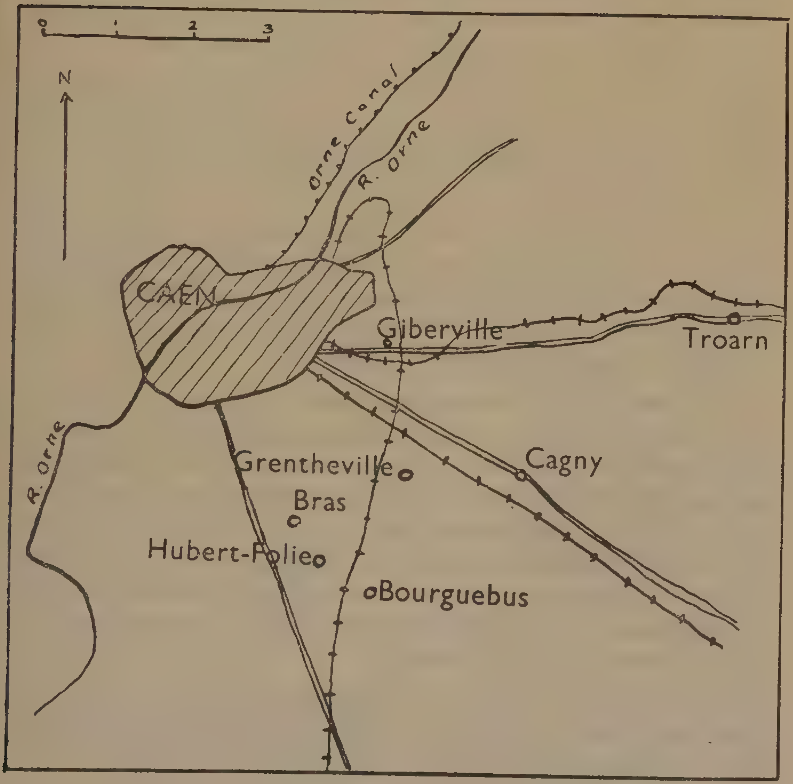
There might have been heavy casualties but for Sergeant R. M. L. Dunbar, N.C.O. in charge of Signals. Collecting his signallers, he raced round the hedges, regardless of bullets, shooting or capturing the snipers as he went; earning the Military Medal by his adroit enterprise.

All three Batteries had casualties during the advance. Gunners E. T. Jones and F. Kirkham were killed and G lost a stalwart No. 1 in Sergeant J. Clark, who, with Gunner J. E. Wood, died of wounds.

Only one Medical Officer was to hand, for M.O.s' "soft" trucks had been forbidden to take part because of their entire lack of protection. However, 13 Regiment's doctor, Captain Malcolm Cree, had not paid too strict attention to this order; nor had Lance-Bombardier F. Buckley, the driver of his 15-cwt. truck —which was just as well. Cree was well up, riding in a half-track. He handled 80 cases during the day.

Buckley lost touch with him at the railway crossing, so carried on by himself. Thrusting forward to where the tanks were in action, he picked up, treated and evacuated the wounded for six hours, though his truck, the only unarmoured vehicle in the forward area, was hit repeatedly by splinters. Altogether he evacuated some 25 wounded men, and earned the Military Medal.

OPERATION GOODWOOD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R. Orne

The tanks were, indeed, having a stiff tussle with the enemy Panzers, and 13 Regiment's F.O.O.s were, of course, in the thick of it. Two of their tanks were disabled, both of H Battery. Lieut. A. N. Bicket was hit—slightly—in the leg: Captain Claude Vivian so seriously that he died of his wounds.

As Vivian's tank was knocked out Lieut. Mather took over as F.O.O. in a carrier. The tanks were nearing their first objective; and Mather found he must get observation towards Bras and Hubert-Folie on the right flank. Forward tanks told him it was unsafe to go on, as enemy armour and infantry covered the area. Nevertheless, manœuvring his carrier into a suitable position, he dismounted with his remote control set, told his crew to cover him with a Bren gun, as the crops in front concealed enemy infantry, and crawled forward to a suitable O.P., where he carried on.

Not only was the whole area under heavy enemy shell fire; Mather had got himself so far forward that he was straddled by our own artillery concentration. His dash and vigour earned him the Military Cross.

Back at Brigade H.Q. shell and mortar fire was falling thick. ("Back" is not quite the word; H.Q. was almost level with the guns. For most of the day the Regiment were less than 1000 yards from the front line. In fact at one stage I Battery were in front of the leading tanks. But not for long!)

Lieut.-Colonel Daniell thought a house in Grentheville hamlet concealed the O.P. which was directing the fire. He put H Battery on to it; they demolished it; the fire continued. Then, 150 yards away on the right, he noted a clump of bushes and undergrowth on a railway embankment which aroused his suspicions. He ordered Captain "Bunny" Davies to engage it with his Sherman 75-mm. and his Browning. The shelling ceased, and out stepped the enemy O.P. officer, adding one more to the 75 prisoners whom H Battery gathered during the day.

In the evening the enemy counter-attacked fiercely. Another F.O.O. tank was knocked out by a Panzer. Gunner R. Sutton, its driver—he had driven Captain Vivian too, till that officer was mortally wounded earlier in the day—placed the wounded crew in a hollow, but by the time he had done so the British tanks had been driven back 1400 yards. That distance Sutton had to walk, under shell fire from friend and enemy alike.

He found stretcher bearers in a half-track, guided them to his hollow and helped them gather other casualties. One officer and two other ranks of 13 Regiment and several of 3 R.T.R., who would otherwise have died or fallen into enemy hands, were rescued by Sutton's tenacity, which won him the Military Medal.

Then darkness fell. Spent tankmen and gunners snatched a few hours' sleep on the ground they had won.

Only a little ground. The first day's thrust of Goodwood, prefaced by 7000 tons of airborne explosive, had advanced General Montgomery's Army seven miles. 11 Armoured Division had lost more than half their tanks (40 destroyed, some 80 damaged or broken down, but recoverable). The Guards, having captured Cagny, were halted before a barrier of anti-tank guns. 7 Armoured Division, the Desert Rats, had come late into the battle and were brought to a standstill by a chain of fortified villages, still only three miles from Caen.

While the tank and gun crews slept, and while next morning they resumed their slogging match, things were happening in SHAEF, the Allied Headquarters, which might have cost the Allied cause dear.

General Montgomery had not broken through. His communiqué on the first evening of the battle said: "Early this morning British and Canadian troops of the Second Army attacked and broke through into the area east of the Orne and south-east of Caen." This, in fact, he had done: but it was not the "break through" which Supreme Headquarters had expected.

General Eisenhower's aide, Captain Harry Butcher, vividly describes their disappointment:[1] "Tedder called Ike and said Monty had, in effect, stopped his armour from going farther. Ike was mad. . . . Tedder said the British Chiefs of Staff would support any recommendation that Ike might care to make with respect to Monty for not succeeding in going places with his big three-armoured-division push".

Whether that really meant what it appeared to mean, that the Supreme Commander was free, if he wished, to dismiss General Montgomery for his "failure", history does not yet certainly relate.

At all events, he did nothing of the kind. Indeed General de Guingand,[2] General Montgomery's tactful and ubiquitous Chief of Staff, discounts the story of dissension at Headquarters.

The fact is, the critics of General Montgomery's "slowness" and "failure to break through" did not understand what that far-seeing commander was up to. Nor, fortunately, did the enemy: but he had expressed it pretty clearly a few weeks earlier.[3]

He had not expected to "break through" on any decisive scale, though had the powerful enemy confronting him cracked, he, who had some experience of pursuit, would have known what to do. The break-through was to be reserved for his American brothers-in-arms, away to the west.

How far General Montgomery had succeeded, General de Guingand shews in a table:[4]

	Panzer Divisions on	
	Caumont-Caen Sector	*Remainder of front*
Mid-June	4	nil
Early July	7+	½
Mid-July	6	2
20 July	5	3

Meanwhile it was Second Army's part, 11 Division's part, 29 Armoured Brigade's part, 13 Regiment's part to pin down a stubborn and powerful enemy by unremitting hammering. This, on the battle's second day, they proceeded to do. German shelling grew fiercer. In the morning Brigade H.Q. got most of it, and Bombardier M. H. W. Fraser was killed there.

At noon the Brigade, with 2 Northampton Yeomanry, the Division's Reconnaissance Regiment, under command, attacked again, thrusting their armour into Bras and Hubert-Folie. F.O.O.s were quick to bring down fire, as when H Battery pulled a squadron of 3 Royal Tank Regiment out of an awkward corner with an opportune smoke screen; and G's F.O.O.s, calling on the medium artillery, the people whose shells could really deal with the Panzers' armour, brewed up two of them.

There were several casualties, including Gunner S. A. Blackburn, killed; and Captain Davies, forward with the Northampton Yeomanry, received a splinter wound in the mouth when going to the help of an officer wounded by a mortar shell.

On the third day, in torrential rain, the Regiment were relieved. Guns, which had only been out of action for twenty-four hours in four weeks, needed overhaul. With three officers and eight other ranks killed, and similar numbers wounded, there was need for a reorganising of sub-units. But hearts were high. Seven decorations had been earned by the Regiment, though they did not yet know of these awards. 11 Armoured Division had won their spurs. A fresh test lay before them.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

"Three Years with Eisenhower."

[2] "Operation Victory."

[3] See page 255.

[4] Three days before Operation Goodwood began, Rommel had written despairingly to his Führer—"Our troops are fighting heroically but even so the end of this unequal battle is in sight." On 17 July Allied aircraft, seeing a staff car on the road near Livarot, south-west of Lisieux, had riddled it with cannon fire. It turned over in a ditch, flinging out, as it did so, the battered and unconscious form of Rommel. He did not die of his wounds: but three months later, at the hands of Hitler's assassins.

4. THE BOCAGE

30 *July*—6 *August* 1944

Now it was possible for all the world to see what General Montgomery was "up to".

In Operation Cobra General Bradley, with fifteen divisions of his own and four of General Patton's Third U.S. Army in reserve, was about to burst through an enemy front where only nine German divisions opposed him—scratch formations, somewhat exhausted by more than a month in continuous action; one of them, according to the German commander, "completely untrained"; with only 110 tanks between them.

To make the American break-through possible, General Montgomery, with the fourteen divisions of General Dempsey's Army, intended to hold in combat still, as for the past month he had succeeded in doing, fourteen German divisions mustering 600 tanks. That was the meaning of the Battle of the Bocage, into which 13 Regiment were now to be plunged.

It was to be fought in new and difficult country. The Bocage, stretching south-west of Caen from Villers-Bocage to Vire, is a peculiar land of deep valleys secluded among beech and chestnut woods, high granite and red sandstone plateaux scattered with great blocks of rocks, lean fields where grazed, in peacetime, dairy cattle which, though diminutive, numbered among the best milk-producers of France; with rustic roads winding up hill and down dale among sombre farmhouses; with adorable views from each of its 1000-foot hills; but the devil of a country to fight in.

It possessed one feature which the Division had never encountered during their training in the English countryside. Each hedge was set upon an almost vertical bank; and though tanks could, with some difficulty, surmount these, they had to expose their soft under-bellies to do so and, thus awkwardly placed as they topped the rise, to grapple then with the thick hedge.[1] Each bank, with its ditches on either side, formed a ready-made trench.

The Bocage had, however, one advantage from the British tank commander's point of view. Enemy armour, with its longer range, could no longer pound him before he could get at them. In this close country the enemy was always within range when you came across him. The trouble was that, being sited for defence, he generally saw you first.

11 Armoured Division were the spearhead of the attack south of Caumont (Operation Bluecoat) which was to keep the Germans busy. They went into action two brigades up, with the Regiment under command of the armour, but grouped under their own C.O. On the Division's left were 15 (Scottish) Division and Guards Armoured Division.

Further east, 43, 7 Armoured and 50 Divisions struck south-eastwards through Aunay. Far away to the east of Caen, in 13 Regiment's old battle area of the Bourguebus Ridge, an attack by the Canadians and 51 (Highland) Division still led the Germans to believe (as General Montgomery intended they should) that here lay the real danger of a break-through.

Bluecoat began, at 0600 hours on 30 July, with the Regiment joining in the initial fire plan. Slowly but steadily 29 Armoured Brigade, with 3 Monmouths, pressed forward through Fierville towards evening in the face of considerable shell and mortar fire. As their thrust started, Lieut. A. F. Hodgson, commanding E Troop for the first time (in place of Captain Davies), was wounded.

With gathering momentum they carried their attack on the following day by St. Jean-des-Essartiers and St. Martin-des-Besaces, through the thick forest of L'Evêque to the high ground south of the river Souleuvre, three or four miles west of Beny-Bocage; Major Gaunt, Captain Davidge and Captain Budgen accompanying 23 Hussars in a hotly-contested advance.

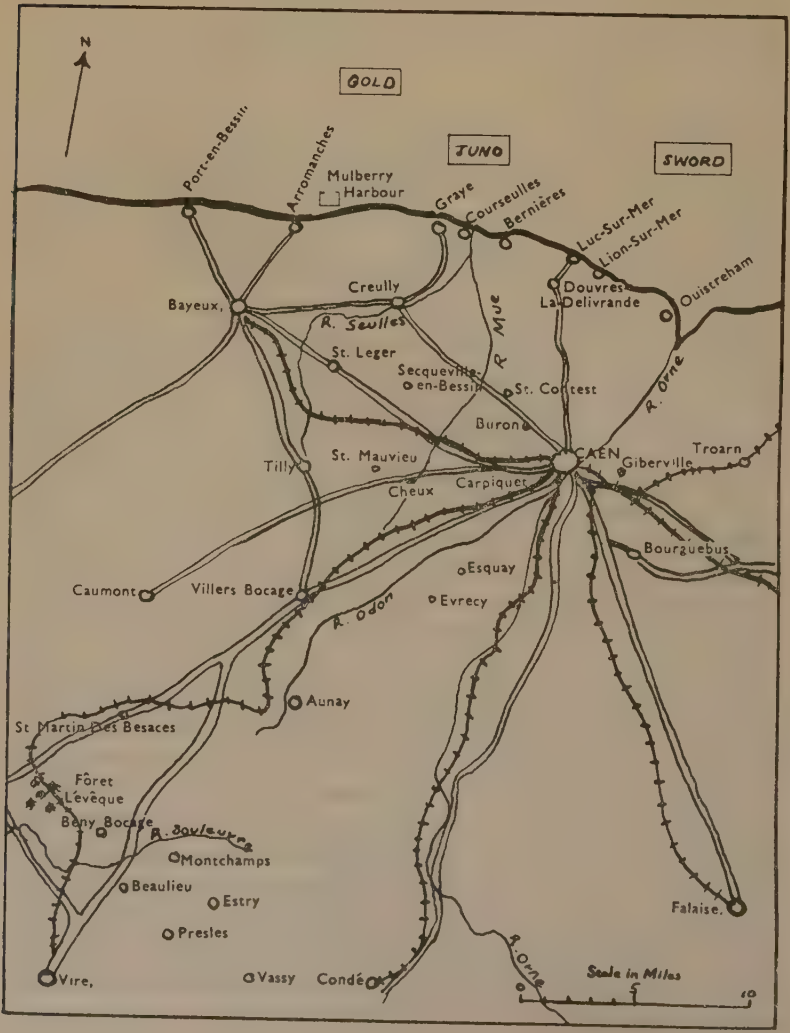
The Division's thrust wheeled left on 1 August, and as the guns moved past La Vallée Sergeant S. S. Woolger, N.C.O. in charge of Signals, G Battery, and Gunner F. E. Enever were killed. Answering calls for fire as they moved step by step across the wooded country through the next two days, the Regiment lost Gunners H. J. Shaw and J. O'Rourke, both mortally wounded.

Lieut. F. T. Smith, the Signals Officer, was hit too, but not severely, and he carried on; but Captain A. D. K. Peploe of H Battery, doing F.O.O. with 3 Royal Tank Regiment, was badly wounded by shell fire when going to the assistance of a mortally wounded officer.

The skill and judgment with which he led I Battery throughout this fluid and hard-fought action earned Major the O'Grady the Military Cross. He did not learn of it till many months later, by which time he had added to his reputation as a battery commander.

There could hardly have been a worse moment, from the German Commander's point of view, for the Führer to order a

OPERATION BLUECOAT


N
GOLD
JUNO
SWORD
Port-en-Bessin
Arromanches
Mulberry Harbour
Graye
Courseulles
Bernières
Luc-Sur-Mer
Lion-Sur-Mer
Ouistreham
Douvres La Delivrande
Creully
Bayeux,
R. Seulles
St. Leger
Secqueville-en-Bessin
R. Mue
St. Contest
R. Orne
Buron
CAEN
Giberville
Troarn
St. Mauvieu
Tilly
Cheux
Carpiquet
Bourguebus
Esquay
Evrecy
Caumont
Villers Bocage
R. Odon
Aunay
St Martin Des Besaces
Fôret L'evêque
Bény Bocage
R. Souleuvre
Montchamps
Beaulieu
Estry
Presles
Vire,
Vassy
Condé
R. Orne
Falaise.
Scale in Miles
5
10

full-scale counter-attack. Hausser's Seventh Army, with all the armour they could muster, were to smash through to Avranches, pinning General Patton in the Cherbourg peninsula.

It was the German Seventh Army's death warrant, as their commander well knew. Nevertheless he made the attempt.

On his north, General Dempsey's Bluecoat thrust threatened to sever Seventh Army from the forces grouped round Caen. And there was now no question of bottling up the Americans. With a superb degree of drive General Patton had seized Avranches and the crossing over the river Selune at Pontaubault.

In three days seven divisions, defying logistics and scoffing at march-tables, had raced through the one-road gap. Refusing even to glance over his right shoulder, General Patton had despatched a few divisions into Brittany. There they would put the finishing touch to what had already been done by French and British paratroops. Arming and joining with the now openly fighting French Forces of the Interior, these air invaders would in due course liberate Brest and all Brittany.

Meanwhile General Patton's eyes were fixed eastwards; and within three days of his break-through his XV U.S. Corps had leapt forward 75 miles, almost to the gates of Le Mans.

It was exactly as General Montgomery had planned more than a month ago: a wide sweep south of the Bocage country to Le Mans—Alençon; and the pinning of German forces between Caumont and Caen had rendered it possible.

What had this German westwards thrust to do with 13 Regiment, pressing downwards from the north? Just this: that for six days, on the right of the enemy attack, flankguard German infiltrations and "opportunity" targets kept 13 Regiment's wireless so busy that Lieut.-Colonel Daniell counted it a slack period if he was able to snatch two to four hours' sleep. As to the guns, the Numbers One dared not leave them loaded; the pieces were so hot.

Constant counter-attacks—in one of which Gunner N. Weir was mortally wounded—gave 13 Regiment a good deal to think about as, firing across the Vire-Condé road in support of 29 Armoured Division a thousand yards ahead, they countered, amid shell, mortar and machine-gun fire, assaults of up to divisional strength.

Throughout the Bocage battle Battery Sergeant Major Arthur Powdrill (D Troop, H Battery) was a tower of strength.

When, at Le Desert, the Regiment were threatened on all sides by infiltrating enemy infantry, with Panzers in support, he went forward as F.O.O., dispersed a band of German infantry, located their tanks and remained in observation until heavy Spandau fire from the rear forced him to withdraw. His prompt tackling of the situation saved the Regiment from a tight corner.

(He had travelled far before his reward came to him, and earned it over and over again. Left behind with temporarily disabled Sextons, he had brought them forward unerringly, with their crews, through country full of Germans not yet rounded up; had dealt with wounded in gun positions under heavy shell fire, and taken charge in many a difficult situation before, right on the German frontier, he learned that he had been awarded the Military Cross, a most exceptional award for a W.O. II. Another stalwart received his reward at the same time—the Military Medal for Sergeant R. Duncan of I Battery, an N.C.O. whose coolness in action had time and again been outstanding.)

The Regiment not only had their normal job to do. Each night Major Farquhar, with other officers, led out thug patrols, routing out infiltrating enemy infantry.

Tirelessly the F.O.O.s carried on with their ever-changing tasks. Witness Captain Davidge, commanding A Troop up among 23 Hussars near Le Bas Perier. He was out well forward of his tank, using his No. 18 wireless set as remote control during a strong counter-attack. His O.P. was heavily shelled: the set destroyed. He went back to his tank, ran a telephone line back to his O.P., and thus, for five hours under intense and continuous shell and mortar fire, directed the fire of his own Divisional artillery and the Army Group's heavier guns, earning the special thanks of the C.O. 23 Hussars, and the Military Cross.

NOTE TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1] An enterprising American, Sergeant Culin, hit on a means of coping with these obstacles. It was as clever as any of the "funny" devices—the flail-wielding Crabs, the flame-throwing Crocodiles and those armoured navvies the AVREs (Armoured Vehicles Royal Engineers)—with which that master of military improvisation General Hobart had equipped his legendary and invaluable 79 Armoured Division. Culin's scheme was to fasten in front of the tank sturdy steel blades (made, resourcefully, from "Rommel's asparagus", the stakes with which the Germans had studded the invasion beaches). These blades, scything away at the roots of the hedges, carried them bodily in front of the tank, turning what had been a barrier into an impromptu camouflage. With typical American celerity, the device (known as the Rhinoceros) was put into general use immediately—but of course it had not penetrated into the British service in time for Bluecoat.

5. THE BREAKOUT

6 *August*—7 *September* 1944

The picture of the battle for the 10 days 6-16 August is that of a huge dragnet closing round the German Seventh Army. Hemmed in a rough circle some 35 miles in diameter, they had the British Second Army pressing in (and 13 Regiment had their part in this) from the north-east. On the west of the bulge, later to be known as the Falaise Pocket, First U.S. Army had blunted the counter-attack and captured Mortain.

Round the south of the pocket careered General Patton's Third Army, their main force thrusting in a wide sweep, clear of all the Bocage, towards Le Mans; their XV Corps swung north in a left hook, threatening the German supply centre of Argentan.

If that town were taken; if Canadian Army could force their way south quickly enough from just below Caen into Falaise, there would be left only a fifteen-mile space through which the German Seventh Army could escape.

Whether that gap could have been closed in time is still matter for debate. General Patton believed General Harslip's XV U.S. Corps could do it. General Bradley, who knew better what tenacious forces were still massed at the eastern end of the Falaise Pocket, halted XV Corps; and for several days Panzer Group West held up Canadian Army.

In the three days following 13 August, the Falaise Pocket, under pressure from all sides, had shrunk to half its size. Second Army, 11 Armoured Division, 13 Regiment, were driving deep into its western edge. Hitler, demanding to the last a firm stand, had consented to a withdrawal as far as Flers—and Flers was gone. By 17 August the Canadians and their comrades of the Polish Armoured Division had fought their way into Falaise and beyond.

On 19 August the pocket was closed; American and French forces meeting the Poles in Chambois.

But it was not closed for long. For six hours on the following day, despite a stubborn stand, Seventh German Army crashed through the Canadian lines.

One-third of the Army got away; and with them four out of the five German corps commanders, and twelve of the fifteen divisional generals. Fifty thousand men stayed, prisoners, in the pocket, and ten thousand dead. Some 500 tanks and equipment uncountable were abandoned.

Von Kluge, Germany's supreme commander in France, had written Hitler a last despairing letter and taken poison. Whatever distraught orders the Führer might give, the Allies were bound for the Rhine. But the annihilation of the German forces in Normandy remained a might-have-been.

American troops by now were on the Seine. Cutting across the front of the British advance, XIX U.S. Division were digging into a stiff defence near Elbeuf. Above Paris, 7 U.S. Armoured Division were over the river north of Melun. In ever expanding arcs the Allies were sweeping across northern France.

French Forces of the Interior, now finally throwing off the German yoke, were in command of Paris. On 20 August Cholitz, the German Commander, asked for an armistice, and was given it, to save bloodshed and destruction overwhelming the city; and on 25 August 2 French Armoured Division and 4 U.S. Infantry Division were driving triumphant through the exultant boulevards.

XXX Corps, now inspired with the drive and enthusiasm of Lieut.-General Horrocks, took their line around Normandy's southern edge, with 11 Armoured Division in the van.

Thus from Montchamps, where the chase started, 13 Regiment advanced along a route impeded not only by enemy rearguards but by mines, demolitions, booby-traps: through Vassy, round Argentan, through Exmes and St. André Exchampfour to L'Aigle.

There, the Battle of Normandy being now over, they halted for four days to attend to maintenance. Then on, in a march of almost peace-time nonchalance, to cross the Seine at Vernon in the moonlight supplemented by fairy lamps marking the passage over a shattered wooden bridge. On again through the maze of lanes which, if maps were to be trusted, led to Tilly, their halting place.

But maps were not to be trusted; and, more than the three stray rifle shots that greeted them from the thickets, their serenity was disturbed by quite the rudest traffic control policeman in the

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OPPOSITE

86 Regiment

UPPER: *Guns of 274 Battery at Chadwell Heath.*

LOWER: *"A bit of bull" by 274 Battery, St. Nicholas, Belgium, July 1945.*

Corps of Military Police, whose directions as to the correct road were interspersed with accusations of unnatural practices and reflections on the morals of the Regiment's female ancestry, that they should come blundering over his crossroad in the dark.

Still swerving northwards, they passed, through a twenty-four-hour downpour, into Mainneville, cheered by villagers, impeded only a little by enemy guerillas, till at dusk on 30 August they halted briefly 30 miles from Amiens; carrying on through the night to enter the town by dawn.

The enemy in Amiens were taken by surprise. The commander was at breakfast when the armour entered the town. He discounted the news as a scare; carried on with his coffee and rolls—and had his next meal in a prisoners-of-war camp.

There was a good deal of shooting as 29 Armoured Brigade quickly secured all the river crossings—intact—and dealt with a variety of enemy troops bent on escaping by way of Amiens and its bridges; among them a column of horse-drawn transport;[1] but by noon the city was securely in British hands.

The advance continued on 1 September. Opposition was patchy, but on the whole light, and the Regiment halted for the night astride the Arras–St. Pol road, near Aubigny, having covered 35 miles. Now they were in the really occupied France, and everywhere the enthusiasm was tremendous. Bunting and flags were hastily unfurled in villages startled and delighted by the arrival of their liberators.

Everywhere they met enthusiastic and welcoming co-operation from the Maquis. They mopped up the Germans left behind in the woods; appeared out of the blue to give warning of parties left to ambush the advancing columns. If a bridge was blown, Maquis were there to show the way round. The Regiment passed grim groups where civilians were shaving the heads of women who had been too friendly with the Germans, or breaking down the shop-fronts and houses of collaborators.

A shorter advance on 2 September brought the Regiment across the Vimy Ridge into Lens. They reached the town as the folk were just stirring, and a working day turned into a festival. There was some little fighting—in which Gunner W. H. Bawn of

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OPPOSITE

Major R. H. Cain, V.C.*, The South Staffordshire Regiment (Airborne) (2 Company 1928).*

H Battery was killed—as on 3 September they crossed the Belgian frontier, pressing on for an advance of 80 miles through Tournai and Renaix to just short of Boom, ten miles south of Antwerp.

With 13 Regiment's F.O.O.s accompanying the leading squadrons, 29 Armoured Brigade drove into Antwerp on 4 September; so boldly and swiftly that by early afternoon the leading tanks found the docks unguarded and intact, though in the northern suburbs, and here and there in the city itself, pockets of enemy resistance held out. Shell fire fell sporadically. Bombardier L. W. Hudson was killed soon after the Regiment's arrival.

It was indeed a fantastic medley of grimness and gaiety. The city was in carnival. Happy-faced civilians with their smiling children clambered on the tanks. A moment later a burst of shell fire strewed the gutters with dead. The Regiment, simultaneously *en fête* and in action, lost several good men. Lieut. A. P. G. Bluett, G.P.O. A Troop, was killed when going forward to receive a sniper's surrender. Gunners T. A. Graham, G. J. Halladay, E. Dawson and D. McDonald were killed in the streets. Captain W. Taylor, Battery Captain of I, was seriously wounded.

A man of less robust constitution than "Buck" Taylor would not have survived, for he was hit in both legs by an 88-mm. shell and had bullet wounds in his back. He was evacuated, and the ambulance in which he was travelling ran into the canal at Boom, with Taylor and other wounded inside. Somehow "Buck", despite all his injuries, got out and swam to the bank.

It was due to the prompt action of Captain A. N. Bicket of H Battery that his Armoured Regiment, 3 R. Tanks, escaped casualties: for, bringing down a heavy concentration on the 88-mm. guns of one of the forts covering the city's approaches, he silenced them almost as soon as they opened fire.

The Division had been and gone before the Press was able to pay tribute to their prowess; but the ovation accorded to the Division by the newspaper *Het Handelsblad van Antwerpen* (14 September 1944) deserves a quotation, if only for the fact that the soldiery, arriving dusty and dishevelled, soon transformed themselves, after a wash and brush-up, into paragons of masculine beauty fit to win the hearts of all beholders.

It was headed "Heil De 11 Britische Pantserdivisie" and ran:

"Never will Antwerp be able to express in full its gratitude to the heroes of 11 British Armoured Division (we can now name this

Division, as the B.B.C. has already announced it to the whole world). Through their unmatched courage and the speed of their heavy tanks they broke down all resistance . . .

"Who could have expected it, when under conditions of utmost secrecy and great danger we listened to the B.B.C. and learned that the British had crossed the Seine and reached Beauvais by way of Gisors ? The slow advance in Normandy had not prepared us for the lightning-like thrusts which were to follow . . .

"The shouts of joy, the scenes of wild enthusiasm—these will never be forgotten, and served as first proof of our gratitude to the heroes of 11 Armoured Division who, covered with dust and half dead with fatigue, brought us the liberation which had been so long awaited, and was yet entirely unexpected.

"It is to be hoped that very shortly a great monument will commemorate this feat of arms by 11 Armoured Division, who by the speed of their advance saved our beloved town and renowned harbour from certain and total destruction.

"With all our heart we hope that the commander of these picked troops, aged but 37 years,[2] his Brigadier of 30 years,[3] their even younger chief of staff, and the charming and handsome officers and men will be able to be present in large numbers at a dinner offered them by the grateful citizens of Antwerp."[4]

Three days after the capture of Antwerp, on 7 September, Lieut.-General Ritchie's XII Corps relieved Lieut.-General Horrocks's XXX Corps, who were due to swing north-west in the dual operations which Field-Marshal Montgomery (as he had now become) had in hand—the envelopment of the Ruhr and the driving of a wedge between the enemy's armies in Germany and their forces in Denmark and the Baltic States. 29 Armoured Brigade's parting shot was an attempt—abortive, as it proved—to break out to the north of Antwerp and its docks.

The fact that this task was not pursued, without delay, to a successful conclusion remains one which students of strategy will discuss as long as the handling of ground forces remains a current topic. It is the subject of guarded, though pointed, comment in an official publication:[5] "Between 4 September, when the British 11 Armoured Division entered the city, and 22 September, when, after severe fighting, a bridgehead was secured over the Albert Canal immediately east of Antwerp—a bridgehead that might have been seized without serious opposition within a few hours of the Allied entry into the city—no serious attempt had been made to cover the twenty-mile stretch between Antwerp and the base of the Beveland isthmus.

"Any such move would have deprived the German Fifteenth Army of its only reasonable escape route into Holland . . . By 21 September . . . the bulk of the German Fifteenth Army had been rescued from encirclement.

"If the Beveland isthmus had been cut, the alternative escape route would have entailed a twelve-hour sea voyage through the Dutch islands to Dordrecht and Rotterdam—as against the three-quarters of an hour needed to cross from Breskens to Flushing. These, then, were the troops the British and the Canadian armies were shortly to find themselves fighting north of the estuary and south of the Maas.

"It is fair to record that almost a week elapsed before dock fighting ceased in the port of Antwerp: that the British armoured spearheads had done a mighty trek from the Seine: and that, during this early period, Canadian First Army was still based on the line Bruges–Ghent.

"But if it still be asked why no earlier effort was made to seal off this isthmus escape route, the answer may well be that the directing minds of the war were momentarily thrown off balance when this huge port fell—beyond the dreams of the most optimistic of planners—like a rich, ripe plum into Allied hands . . .

"Again . . . the day that Antwerp was captured, Allied Supreme Headquarters, away at Granville, on the Normandy coast, issued orders for the capture of the Saar, the Frankfurt area, the Ruhr and Antwerp; in that order, and all in twenty-four words. Some little time was to elapse before the hardening of the German front registered itself at Supreme Headquarters.

"In so far as the opening of the port of Antwerp was the responsibility of 21 Army Group—and the fact is inescapable—it must be stated, with the utmost sympathy, that the gaze of its Commander-in-Chief, at that time, for the best reasons in the world, was steadily averted to the east—to Eindhoven, Grave, Nijmegen, Arnhem . . .

"A whole succession of plodding desolate battles north and south of the seventy-mile estuary . . . was to be the price of the failure to free the Scheldt at a time when the German troops were so unnerved by the tale of what had happened in France that they disappeared without bothering to blow up this most valuable prize of the campaign—Antwerp, third largest port in the world."

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

[1] One of the astonishments of the campaign was the wide use which the Germans, arch-exponents of Panzer warfare, still made of horsed vehicles for their supply. (Petrol shortage, intensified by the Allied Air Force's disruption of road and rail traffic, was of course a major reason.) The carnage among horses, as battle lines advanced behind a deluge of air bombs, aroused, among Britain's horse-loving but horseless soldiery, the only compunction they felt at the destruction their onset was spreading.

[2] Major-General G. P. B. Roberts, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

[3] Brigadier C. B. C. Harvey.

[4] And some of them were.

[5] "North-West Europe 1944-45. The Achievement of 21 Army Group" by Major John North. H.M. Stationery Office, 1953.

6. TO THE RHINE

9 *September* 1944—21 *March* 1945

In exactly a month the Allied Forces had advanced from the Bocage to Antwerp—350 miles or thereabouts by the way they had come. What they had done to the German armies Hitler's newest commander in the West was best able to gauge. "The unequal struggle cannot long continue", he told his Führer. The Allies could not now be prevented from driving into the Reich.

Some 380 miles ahead lay Berlin. Could another month of relentless advance carry the Allies to the German capital and end the war before winter set in?

A solid mass of forty divisions, 21 (British) and 12 (U.S.) Army Groups together, to outflank the Siegfried line; with one thrust to pierce deep through Germany; with a right hook to envelop the Ruhr and roll up the defenders of the West Wall while the American armies and the French pinned them in place. That—if a plan of campaign can be crystallised into one paragraph—was Field-Marshal Montgomery's conception.

Only by one all-out effort could it be carried through before winter set in—and Montgomery knew what winter in the Low Countries is like; only if an overwhelming priority, of supply, of logistics, of converging armour and airborne power were concentrated in one mighty blow; only if all other effort were subordinated to it; all other armies kept to the role of a holding attack. It was, in a way, a reversal of the Normandy plan; when the British held the left flank while, on the right, the Americans broke through.

What would have been the consequences to post-war Europe had it been tried, and had it succeeded, it is idle to speculate now. Equally profitless to conjecture which, of the three main objections to the plan, weighed most in deciding the Supreme Commander against it.

It cut right across the American doctrine, dear to the Staff in Washington, of pushing against the enemy all along the front.

It *might* have been over-optimistic, as to supply, as to the Germans' chance of rallying a stouter resistance, as to the difficulties of the river-barred terrain.

It might have aroused resentment in America, where newspaper comment had a greater influence on strategy than it has ever had in Britain, that the ever-victorious Patton, now thrusting at the Meuse, should be halted in his triumphant progress so that a British commander could break through.

Opinions in Allied high circles were not, and still are not, unanimous. German commanders, writing after the war, did not hesitate to call the rejection of Field-Marshal Montgomery's plan this war's equivalent of the "miracle of the Marne", the German indecision that saved the French in 1914.

Gunners in their Sextons, F.O.O.s in their tanks, recked little of these great issues as 13 Regiment moved out of Antwerp on 8 September; swinging from the west to the east flank of 21 Army Group, through Louvain and Diest, to a halting place three miles short of Beeringen, where Guards Armoured Division had bridged the Albert Canal.

When, on 9 September, the Regiment crossed the bridge, it was with the aim of taking the little town of Peer, twelve miles on. The Division had covered no more than seven miles, however, when they ran into stiff opposition at Helchteren.

Observation, in this close country, was difficult. Captain Budgen of G Battery, who was with the leading troop of 23 Hussars as F.O.O., pressed forward, not only locating the enemy pockets but engaging them—with machine-gun fire until his Browning jammed, then with his rifle.

The forward tanks were in bazooka range now. The one next to Budgen's was hit and set on fire. Without hesitation he manœuvred into a position where he could see the bazooka and, leaning out of his turret, killed its crew of three with rifle fire. Another, close by—there were fifteen in an area no bigger than Battersea Park—fired two shots at his tank. This, too, he dealt with.

All around the enemy were sniping at him with everything from rifles to mortars. With just his trusty musket he carried on. Two crews surrendered to him; two left their weapons and ran; and he did not leave his task until every bazooka had been eliminated. His quick and decisive action, and total disregard of personal danger, earned him the Military Cross.

The infantry came up next day (11 September) and the advance continued through Peer to Kleine Broghel. At Peer Captain Young had a narrow squeak. Fired at by an 88-mm. gun, he replied with his 75-mm. and hit it with his first shot. His jubilation was tempered by the discovery, a little later, that he had badly misjudged the distance—but also that his sights were 400 yards out of true—a happy kind of compensating error.

As the Regiment moved up within six miles of the Dutch border Gunner G. H. W. Bannister was killed. There they remained for a week, protecting the right flank of their friends of Guards Armoured Brigade across the Meuse-Escaut Canal.

Eighty-five miles north, the airborne warriors of Arnhem, in 13 days of frustrated gallantry, were earning their place in history. But the Regiment knew little of this, having preoccupations of their own as, on 20 September, they passed into Holland by way of Heeze, Someren and Geldrop—awkward country for guns: the open ground marshy, the coppices giving good cover for snipers. G and H Batteries were in Helmond by 22 September, but doubled back to join in a right-handed advance through the infantry brigade that had bridged the canal between Someren and Asten. There was mopping up to do around Asten and Deurne, and a deal of shelling. On the Helmond road, when Captain Young's tank was knocked out by a Panzer, I Battery lost a good soldier—Gunner L. F. Adams, first man in the Regiment to win a decoration: his Military Medal for bravery at St. Mauvieu.

There followed a notable day in 13 Regiment's history. At 1827 hours on 25 September a section of H Battery, in action along the Milheeze–Oploo road, fired a salvo into Germany: the first Royal Horse Artillery and the first Regiment of the Corps to do so.

Here in the north-east corner of Brabant the Regiment spent three strenuous though unspectacular months.

Whether, in the light of after events, the Supreme Commander's decision was right or wrong, it was too late, now, to put all the Allied resources into a break-through round the northern end of the Siegfried line. The German forces had been given time to rally. All that they could muster were summoned—determined men and abundant guns—to avert the turning of the Western Wall. Their stubborn stand, if it had not changed Field-Marshal Montgomery's ultimate intention, had at all events radically affected his chance of achieving it.

His men now faced a campaign which, from the point of view of the poor blessed infantry, must have rivalled the grimmest operations of the 1914-18 war.

They must advance now, not in sweeps of hundreds of miles, but in bitterly contested bounds of hundreds of yards, across terrain whose natural obstacles alone might well have deterred less resolute troops under a less resolute commander.

This was the Peel country: flooded even in a normal winter (and the coming winter was to be no normal one); whose embanked roads, marked in flood time only by lines of sticks standing out of the water, crumbled under the load of armour; where minefields could not be skirted; where the digging of foxholes, waterlogged before they were dug, was to become a grim shivering joke.

This country had now to be cleared, up to the line of the Maas, before there could be question of a foothold on the Rhine. More than that: now that the enemy had been given breathing space, his untouched armies to the north, in Denmark and up to the Baltic shore, must be sealed off.

Thus from 2 to 5 October the Regiment found themselves in a slogging match, supporting 7 U.S. Armoured Division, then 3 British Division (for only infantry could round off such a task) in an operation to take the village of Overloon. As, at dusk, attacks died down, enemy batteries resumed their nightly strafe.

Several salvoes fell on 11 October in I Battery's position, one round landing on top of a bivouac where men were sleeping. Gunner H. T. Cook was killed; Gunner B. J. Clare mortally wounded; seven others were hit. As next day's fire plan was put into effect, Gunner J. Smith was also killed. For 170 minutes, with no rests, the Regiment fired a barrage of 300 rounds per gun.

In a land where a five-foot rise was reckoned a hill—where mud made it impossible for F.O.O.s' tanks to get forward—church towers were at a premium as observation posts.

Such was the steeple of Leunen; tenanted for days on end by Captain Budgen, though the Germans still held half the village. They could see, as well as our own men, his huge frame perched on a chair as he directed the batteries' fire. They tried everything to get him out: showering the tower with "moaning Minnies", the deadly *nebelwerfer*; turning on to it their 88-mms.

Finally, they even brought up a tank at point-blank range to shoot him down; but the walls were thick and stood up to it. Only the front of the belfry fell out.

"I ordered Budgen back for a rest," says Lieut.-Colonel Daniell in an account of the day's fighting, "and Garry Davidge took his place in this horrible spot. Next day I found them both there. Bill said he had come back to keep Garry company—the action of a brave man who knew only too well the danger."

Throughout the three months of stalemate, during which the Regiment continued their dogged gunnery close to the German border, Budgen's gallantry was an inspiration. One early morning in September, when 29 Armoured Brigade were attacking in the direction of Overloon, he saw a platoon of the Rifle Brigade badly caught by machine-guns and mortars, and went over in his tank to help them. As he bent over a severely wounded corporal, the man opened his eyes and, recognising him, said: "Thank God, Bill! Now you are here everything will be all right."

While static warfare occupied the Regiment, a good deal had been happening elsewhere.

Aachen, in October, had surrendered to First U.S. Army. General Patton, in the south, consuming vast quantities of ammunition, had battered his way into Metz, though the seven strong points around the fortress held out until 13 December. A strong German counter-attack had shaken 21 Army Group's line at Venraij; a stronger British thrust had restored it and, in early December, eliminated the last pocket of German resistance west of the Maas.

The Scheldt approaches had been cleared by Canadian First Army in bloody waterlogged battles, enthusiastically aided by the Royal Navy, Commandos, and the amphibious "Funnies" of General Hobart's versatile 79 Armoured Division—troop-carrying Buffaloes, D.D. (dual drive) tanks and the rest. Antwerp had now become a port of supply—and target for hundreds of V bombs.

Then on 2 December the Germans cut the dykes. Floods, swollen by the heaviest rains the Continent had known for years, closed for the winter the Arnhem gateway to the Ruhr.

11 Armoured Division had moved south; 29 Armoured Brigade had gone to France to refit; but the Regiment had been left in their watery corner, still supporting their friends of 3 Division, when for ten days the free world held its breath as fourteen German infantry divisions, with five Panzer divisions and 2000 guns, pierced the thinly-held American front in the Ardennes.

Historians innumerable have chronicled the events of those thirty days; from the moment the column broke through, with convoys of empty wagons racing along in rear to receive the spoils of Brussels, Liege and Antwerp, to the day when, with Britain's XXX Corps across their northward path and Field-Marshal Montgomery's strong, though improvised, reserve of American forces ready to strike, 2 U.S. Armoured Division thrust the German nose southward and punched it back.

It was, both retreat and recovery, an American affair; except that over the Germans' line of advance hovered their old enemy Field-Marshal Montgomery; fully informed (his flock of liaison officers had told him more of the battle than, in the agonised moment, the Americans themselves knew); restraining, to their vehement indignation, the Americans' hot-tempered desire to plunge in at once for an expensive and uncertain cut-and-thrust revenge; quite annoyingly calm.

If his placid, methodical control of the situation irritated his brothers-in-arms—with perhaps a faint air of "I told you so"—he would have been superhuman had it been otherwise.

Throughout the war he had indeed "played for the side". Almost within sight of Tunis, which he had come a thousand miles to take, he had given up two of his best divisions to General Eisenhower's army, his rivals in the race, so that the Supreme Commander might claim the prize.

At Caen he had held the flower of the German Panzer armies locked in his grip—while Americans, even some of his own countrymen, fumed at him for "sitting still"—so that, according to his plan, General Patton might, when the right time came, gallop across the enemy's unguarded flank.

He had tried—and failed till it was too late—to win the Supreme Command to his plan for an all-out thrust round the Ruhr, which would have made a winter war unlikely and the Ardennes push unthinkable.

Now under his guidance, in what he called "one of the most interesting and tricky operations I have ever handled", the Americans, in a fury of revengeful gallantry, were to regain their old line—no nearer Berlin, however, than in September.

It was a spell when personalities shewed: General Patton's for instance. He had forgotten, for a moment, that he was playing for a side. When a division was demanded of him (before he knew how critical the situation was) he had hastily thrown his armour into local battle lest that should be demanded too.

He made characteristic amends when, realising the danger, he sent his troops, in one of his swiftest advances, to the help of Bastogne.

There—another personal sidelight—Brigadier-General McAuliffe was hemmed around with Panzers, in a pocket which the Germans were bound to eliminate before they could safely press on.

They sent emissaries to tell him the position was hopeless: he had better surrender.

He replied in the shortest message ever sent to an enemy in war: "To the German Commander: Nuts."

Hints of all this came as far-off news to 13 Regiment, sitting in the slush and snow. They had moved, on 15 December, some twenty miles south, to Neeritter, on the north-eastern tip of Belgium. There they stayed, fending off German patrols, in and out of action in support of all and sundry, losing a man here and a man there and waiting for the next move.

The cold that set in before Christmas, and lasted a month, not only doubled their discomforts; it halved their rest. It meant double guards, lest a man, immobile in the snow, might fall asleep. It meant starting up every vehicle thrice in the night and running it for twenty minutes—a business involving much cursing; but not a single truck or tank was lost or damaged through frost.

Rather modified festivities—much pork and but little liquor—marked the Regiment's first and only Christmas overseas. Only on the holy day itself was there a lull on either side; and Scotsmen in the Regiment celebrated Hogmanay by watching, with admiration, the Light Anti-Aircraft Troop attached to the Regiment bring down two enemy aircraft out of a number which chose New Year's Eve for a pretty heavy attack.

It was the first time since Normandy that these A.A. guns had fired in their proper role.

Five more names were added to the casualty list as the Regiment supported first one attack, then another, designed to clear Second Army's way to the Rhine. Gunners R. Tothill and C. Willis were killed when a premature occurred in a Sexton. Lance-Bombardier W. J. Giles fell when supporting 7 Armoured Division, the Desert Rats, in a north-eastern thrust from Sittard toward Roermond.

This was Operation Blackcock; fought, with many infantry casualties, over frost-bound fields in cold so bitter that the opening smoke screen froze in the air into a dense and permanent fog. Before that fight was over the Regiment, having moved up to Baexem, found themselves still heading north as far as Roggel, to support an attack, still with the same aim, by 3 Parachute Brigade of 6 Airborne Division. Bombardier L. J. Flack and Gunner J. W. Nash were killed in that affair.

February thaws and torrential rain so spread the rising Meuse that for some cut-off sub-units ration supply became an acute problem, ammunition replenishment a virtual impossibility. All the Regiment were down to reserve rations. G Battery, out of action for lack of shells, had to turn for a while to road repair.

Though 11 Armoured Division moved back to Tilburg, the Regiment were again left in the battle area with tasks still to do: the last, at Horst, the support of 115 Infantry Brigade.

There followed nearly a month of "rest and refitting" at Asten; the accent decidedly on the latter as the O.P.s became possessed of Cromwell tanks and had to learn their tricks.

While this was under way, a welcome signal came that Major R. Gaunt of G Battery had been awarded the D.S.O. Since the Bocage he had stood out alike for his technical skill and his coolness in action; in the enemy counter-attacks at Le Bas Perier, throughout the advance from the Seine to Antwerp, right up to the fighting that had just concluded.

The Americans had been first over the Rhine. By a piece of good luck their III Corps, closing down to the bank at Remagen, had found the bridge almost intact. By a piece of good generalship they had seized it, thrown an armoured spearhead across and so exploited it that in seventeen days (7 to 24 March) they held a bridgehead twenty-five miles long and twelve deep. General Patton, too, to his great delight, had put his 5 Division across at Karlsruhe a day ahead of Field-Marshal Montgomery.

Nevertheless it was on Montgomery's front that the great, the decisive crossing was to be made; and on 21 March 13 Regiment, having moved overnight into the Udem area, received their Commander's signal "21 Army Group will now cross the Rhine".

7. —— AND OVER

23 *March*—9 *May* 1945

At 2100 hours on 23 March 1945 the first British troops—1 Commando Brigade—crossed the Rhine at Wesel. Along a 25-mile front 3300 guns heralded their passage across the river by an hour's barrage so intense that the heap of debris which had been a town as populous as Winchester was captured with only 36 casualties.

Four hours earlier 13 Regiment had started their contribution to this achievement. From their viewpoint overlooking the shattered north-west corner of the Reich, with the little towns of the Rhine plain spread out before them—Goch, Cleve, Calcar; now mounds of rubble identifiable only by the map—they had begun, at 1700 hours, their counter-battery task.

For ten hours their guns fired without ceasing; then sporadically till the middle of the morning of 24 March, when they moved up to within 1500 yards of the river, to cover the bridgehead established in the night.

In just over fifteen hours they had fired 16,800 rounds—420,000 pounds of high explosive.

Some of the Regiment went up to the Rhine during the day to view the result of their labours. It was an astonishing spectacle. The enemy were only a mile back from the river: yet the banks on either side were quiet and the stream itself disturbed only by the wash of countless "ducks" and similar craft, chugging across on their five hundred yards voyage unhindered, carrying men or stores.

A little way round the bend Sappers were building the first of the many rapidly erected bridges. This was being shelled; and that night the whole area, including the Regiment's position, received sporadic visits from enemy aircraft, as A Echelon, under B.S.M. Forbes of H Battery, reinforced by other transport, brought up 450 rounds per gun to the new position. Otherwise there was no sign of enemy opposition here, though elsewhere it was fierce enough.

Some fine work had been done in keeping up the Batteries' supply of ammunition, and was yet to be done in the next two and a half days, which the Regiment spent supporting 43 Division until they went out of range.

At last it was 11 Armoured Division's turn to cross. They were five days behind their rivals the Desert Rats and the Guards, and were becoming a little anxious that the handicap might be getting a trifle heavy. But on 29 March they were off.

They crossed the Rhine without incident—the first unit to test a frail-looking but (as it proved) quite adequate pontoon bridge which had just opened at Wesel, on the south side of the wrecked railway bridge.

Pushing on rapidly, they passed the crashed and burnt-out gliders of a Canadian battalion of 6 Airborne Division who, overshooting their target by six miles, had dropped right on a German anti-aircraft battery, to whom they fell an easy prey. 13 Regiment had known this tough unit, and supported them, earlier on the Maas, and were much shocked at this evidence of their fate.

Three days later 13 Regiment had outstripped their rivals—but it must be remembered that this was not a cross country "free for all" point-to-point: it was the co-ordinated advance of an Army, under a Commander who knew what he wanted done, and who he intended should do it.

In this thrust across Northern Germany each formation of Second Army encountered, at different stages of their advance, every kind of reception from sullen acquiescence to bitter fighting; and the tempo of their progress varied accordingly.

So it befell that, by the time 7 Armoured Division had reached the Dortmund-Ems canal, 11 Armoured Division had already arrived there and could "show them the way over" by providing them with a bridgehead.

This, however, is jumping ahead.

On their first day across the Rhine the chief enemy 13 Regiment encountered was mud. No fewer than twenty tanks of the Division were bogged, including Lieut.-Colonel Daniell's, which broke an idler in a super-human effort to drag itself clear and was "off net" for twelve hours.

Twenty miles of such going brought the Regiment that night to Heiden, in the north-west corner of Westphalia.

It was a different story on the second day of the advance (30 March). 29 Armoured Brigade were regrouped; G Battery supporting 23 Hussars and 8 Rifle Brigade; H supporting 3 R.T.R. and 4 K.S.L.I., with I Battery spare. The forty-mile march through thick country which brought the Regiment to Emsdetten was here and there fiercely opposed.

Moving up to join the leading tank near Schoppingen, Captain A. N. Young found himself alone and off the centre line. He was shot at by bazookas from the cottages on either side of the road; engaged them, set the cottages on fire and took the survivors prisoner. Chasing behind him came a small enemy convoy, bound in the same direction as he, but not expecting to find a British tank between them and home. This, too, Young shot up, destroying four vehicles and taking 25 prisoners.

As he entered the village he ran into a lorry of infantry and a half-track. Both he destroyed at point-blank range, leaving fifteen men dead who might have caused considerable trouble if he had not so promptly disposed of them.

This swift series of skirmishes was the culmination of a number of incidents which won Captain Young the Military Cross. His coolness, combined with good gunnery in bringing down quick accurate fire on difficult targets, had been noted long before by the armoured regiments he was supporting.

Twice earlier on, when the tanks were held up by a Tiger or Panzer, he had crawled forward with his No. 38 set to within 200 yards of the enemy tanks and brought down on them the fire of the medium artillery.

On another occasion two of the three tanks of the leading troop with which he was travelling were set on fire by an S.P. gun, his own tank hit and the driver killed. Sending the rest of his crew back, Young remained in his immovable tank, directing his battery's fire on to the gun and keeping down the enemy's machine-gun fire while the wounded were rescued, till at dusk he was ordered to withdraw.

For eight or nine hours as they approached Emsdetten the Regiment were locked in battle, and in the town itself there was a stiff fight.

Here Captain Budgen—Bill Budgen, "Stonker Bill", to the entire Regiment—showed once again his total disregard of danger.

OPPOSITE

GOOD-BYE TO LONDON

The Battalion on their way to Bulford to become 162 (H.A.C.) Officer Cadet Training Unit.

REMOVALS · STO
CABINET MAKERS AND UPHOLSTERERS

The leading tanks were bazookered; their crews subjected to heavy machine-gun fire on leaving ship.

With the intention of clearing the machine-gun nests Bill left his tank and walked down the road, calmly as if he had been out for a stroll in an English country lane. Standing in the road by the leading tank—"you would have thought there wasn't a Boche for miles", as one of the men put it—he asked the crew, now taking cover in a ditch, to point out where the fire was coming from; then returned nonchalantly to his own tank to deal with the matter.

"Such valour," his C.O. said, recalling the incident next day, "puts heart into the faintest."

The Regiment found the bridge across the Ems blown in their faces, and it was evening on 31 March before they had crossed another one which, after a K.S.L.I. attack, had been flung over the river at Mesum, north of the town. On 1 April, Easter Day, they crossed the Dortmund-Ems Canal.

This achievement, a landmark in the advance, was marred, for 13 Regiment, by an irreparable loss, the death of Captain Bill Budgen. He died as he had lived, gloriously, fighting to save his friends. Some of the Rifle Brigade, attacking a savagely-fighting rear-guard of German paratroops, found themselves surrounded. Budgen's arrival turned the tide, but he did not live to see it; for, leaving his tank to help the riflemen, he was killed instantly by a sniper's bullet, fired at a few yards' range.

He was buried in the garden of a cottage near by, with the men of the Rifle Brigade who had died with him. The morning's fighting had died down. Only an occasional 88-mm. broke the stillness of the afternoon. Every man who could be spared was at the graveside—from the Regiment, from the Rifle Brigade and from 23 Hussars with whom he fought and lived most, who to a man knew and loved him.

"Bill," wrote Lieut.-Colonel (afterwards Brigadier) Daniell, "was one of the bravest men I have been fortunate in having under my command, either in the Desert or in France and Germany. He was a big man, very athletic, always smiling and in good heart; very kind and most thoughtful; a high class Horse Artillery subaltern, a born leader and beloved of his men.

OPPOSITE

H.A.C. O.C.T.U.

UPPER: *4 Company at battle stations.*

LOWER: *2 Company, November 1939.*

"When I first took over the Regiment, I realised his worth and strove hard to curb his impetuosity, for impetuous men do not live long as F.O.O.s. Curiously enough, once the battle started he seemed to realise this; and though never sparing himself he fought with calmness, with occasional wild abandon in very tight corners. The Battery loved shooting for him, and day and night responded with a will when he called for fire.

"I only saw him despondent once. He had twisted his ankle jumping out of his tank. I found him very lame and threatened to send him on four days' rest. To shew me that he was quite fit he ran off to his tank and jumped on board. He was a very gallant soldier."

In an hour the Regiment had left the spot, to carry on with counter-battery fire, counter-mortar work, fire plans to support the extension of the bridgehead, and local mopping-up attacks on pockets of resistance, mostly flak sites. Through the night they pressed forward among dark woods lit by blazing farms.

They burst out of the canal bridgehead next morning, and on to Tecklenburg, a village of narrow cobbled streets and half-timbered houses among very steep hills.

Here the leading regimental group were held up for three or four hours by opposition typical of what they were to encounter in every village or bottleneck for the next sixteen days—two or three companies of determined infantry armed with small guns, machine-guns and bazookas, with sometimes tanks or S.P. guns in support.

Tecklenburg was cleared after several hours' hard fighting and left burning, and 29 Armoured Brigade moved on, through close country intersected by bog and stream, without stopping for rest or sleep, through the night and the early morning of 3 April, to claim the reward of their forced march when at dawn they captured by surprise, intact, the bridge over the Haase at Eversheide, just north of Osnabruck.

Then ten miles on to Osterkappeln. Among thick woods, the Brigade advanced in separate columns throughout 4 April, with some bitter village fighting *en route*, in which 600 prisoners were taken. I Battery themselves, in a lone trip, brought in 100, collected during the night.

Just before first light (5 April) the Brigade converged on the Weser at Stolzenau, where in three hours 8 Rifle Brigade forced a bridgehead.

Here the Regiment felt sorely the absence of fighter cover. Bounding the bridgehead was a railway embankment alive with self-propelled guns and A.A. dual-purpose weapons, difficult to locate and, dug in as they were, virtually impossible to hit; while to their fire the enemy added persistent and accurate dive-bombing attacks.

G Battery did perhaps their best job of work during the advance, putting down D.F. fire and smoke screens to break up three counter-attacks by S.S. men—a helping hand gratefully acknowledged by and by in a letter from 8 Rifle Brigade.

For three days the Brigade hung on to this bridgehead; then swung right to cross the Weser by a bridge which 6 Airborne Division had secured twelve miles upstream at Petershagen.

Twenty miles on there was the river Leine to be crossed. The Regiment advanced on 9 April, through Wenden, where an afternoon attack by 8 Rifle Brigade demanded a fair amount of gun support, through Nordrebber and Ladenholz, to find all the bridges gone. They came across an old comrade on this advance—Captain Donald Cottam, their former adjutant, now posted to 29 Armoured Brigade as Staff Captain.[1]

They were now in the rich Prussian cornland; where large well-stocked farms, amply supplied with slave-labour and prisoners of war, had carried on, peaceful and prosperous, virtually untouched by war.

The capture *en route* of a U-boat biscuit and chocolate dump shewed our men how well the Germans had fed, right up to the days when the Allied Armies struck into the heart of the Reich.

By a piece of sheer bad luck the Regiment lost, this day, a valuable warrant officer, Battery Sergeant Major E. C. Watts. Riding in his carrier, he was pinned against the backrest and killed by a falling tree.

Impassable at Ladenholz, the Leine was crossed at Mandeslom—by the infantry on 10 April (F.O.O.s from the Regiment accompanying them); by the armour on the following day.

Between this river and its fellow-tributary the Aller, reached at Schwarmstedt and Esperke by evening, some very bloody fighting took place against a German Marine division, but the K.S.L.I. forced the river that night, accompanied by Major "Bunny" Davies, Captain Ernest Mather and Lieut. Pat Delaforce with their No. 18 wireless sets.

Nevertheless, their bridgehead—partly thick wood, partly swamp—was fiercely attacked, and in the two days' battle that followed several casualties were sustained, several decorations won.

On the first day, 12 April, a Tiger tank proved particularly troublesome when the enemy counter-attacked. Approaching within 300 yards, it shelled and machine-gunned Lieut. Delaforce's O.P.

This was too much for Gunner A. McD. Gillies, Delaforce's signaller-runner. His first reaction was to borrow some No. 36 grenades from the infantry and, working his way through the trees, to lob them into the Panzers' cupola. Either the infantrymen could not spare the grenades or they disapproved this procedure. So Gillies went off alone, located the tank and returned to borrow, this time, a P.I.A.T. Thus armed he set out with Lieut. Delaforce to engage the tank, but it had discreetly withdrawn and was not destroyed until the next afternoon, when 3 Royal Tank Regiment dealt with it.

Ever since the crossing of the Rhine, Gillies had shown the true aggressive spirit. One of his jobs as a despatch rider was to safeguard reconnaissance parties from snipers while they were occupied with their directors. This he accomplished to an astonishing degree. Perfectly prepared to take on any number of Germans singlehanded, he personally killed or took prisoner a large assortment of S.S. men and infantry.

His conduct in the bridgehead, which won him the Military Medal, was the culmination of three weeks of fine soldiering.

Friday the thirteenth was indeed "black Friday" for the enemy around the bridgehead. Many more were added to the 300 dead Germans whom the F.O.O.s had counted, in their own bailiwicks, on the previous day. But the Brigade in general, and the Regiment in particular, by no means came off lightly.

There was a ticklish moment when Major Bill Smyth-Osborne, supporting the K.S.L.I. and 3 Royal Tanks with his (H) Battery, saw that the infantry, 1000 yards ahead, were being pinned down by a Tiger during a heavy counter-attack, and needed his help.One of his F.O.O.s had been knocked out, the other, with a complete tank squadron, bogged. The only way to the K.S.L.I. was straight along the road where Panzers were believed to be lurking.

Ignoring their threat he charged full speed down the road. True enough, the Panzers were there. His tank received five direct hits from them, at 200 yards range. Withdrawing his crew and their wounded, he borrowed another tank and charged through to the infantry, putting paid to their troubles.

This indomitable warrior—he had been a Commando before he came to the Regiment—won the Military Cross for his intrepid intervention; but three days later he and his operator were badly wounded in a bomber attack—Smyth-Osborne so seriously that he lost his left arm.

Gunner A. E. Meylan was the co-driver of Smyth-Osborne's tank. When it was hit he sought refuge, with the rest of the crew, in the roadside ditch, but noticed immediately that the driver was not with them. He was, in fact, still in the tank, badly wounded.

Though himself dazed with the concussion of the Panzer shells on his armour, Meylan ran back to the tank, in full view of the Tiger 200 yards away which was firing H.E. and machine-gun bullets at him with deadly accuracy. The tank was burning. Its ammunition was exploding. Meylan shouted through the co-driver's hatch, encouraging the driver to try and bale out; but he was too badly hit to make the effort.

Running round to the other side, in full view of the enemy, with shell and bullets still ricocheting off the burning tank, he hauled the driver out and dragged him to safety, winning the Military Medal for his determined devotion.

Ernest Mather's tank was hit in the same fight and one man hurt; Philip Kinnersley's too, but without casualties.

Next morning all the Armoured Recovery Vehicles available were set to the task of rescuing the bogged tanks—unconventional vehicles, unconventionally manned, by crews whose wireless conversations (they recked little of official frequencies) were in keeping with the hectic occasion. One gem in particular floated over the august Regimental net:

A Welsh voice: Look you, this shower coming down the road; who are they?

A voice from north of the Border: Och, look like the bluidy Home Guarrd to me.

Commandos took over from the tanks and infantry, I Battery remaining to support them. The rest of the Regiment moved east towards Celle (14 April) and harboured just short of Winsen, which the infantry were still clearing.

If the Regiment's zeal for exterminating Germans had shown signs of abating (which it had not) it would have been fanned to a flame as on 15 April they moved north from Winsen—Gunner F. Cownie was killed during this advance—through the typhus area and concentration camp of Belsen. Even as they passed, they had ample evidence that nothing written or spoken on the wireless overdrew the foulness of this Nazi hell.

In the innocent-looking homes all around, full of Nazi certificates, Nazi laudations, were to be seen leather whips which, as one description put it, would cause "the cat" to blush for inefficiency. Small boys were seen carrying them in the streets.[2] The Regiment had grim things to remember as, on 16 April, they pressed on through Ebsdorf, past large dumps of gas shell, through airfields and prisoner-of-war camps, towards Velzen.

It was on this day that they lost Major Smyth-Osborne; his operator, too, was badly wounded; Captain R. T. C. Addington being promoted to command H Battery.

This was a second recognition of services which a few weeks previously had earned him the award of the Military Cross. Throughout the campaign he had been an example of what a first-class Battery Captain can do for his unit. Whether in charge of the gun line or organising the echelons—or, when need arose, acting as F.O.O.—he had combined quite unostentatious hard work with unfailing good humour and cheerfulness and complete disregard of his personal safety.

The Regiment's immediate job was to cut off Velzen. Next day, while they were shooting up the fleeing enemy there, H Battery suffered another loss when an unlucky strike by our own Typhoons wounded Captain Philip Kinnersley.

Still there were stubborn pockets of enemy resistance to be reduced. One at Barum took 8 R.B., with active support from the Regiment's guns, a day's fighting to eliminate—at little cost, fortunately, to the infantry, though the enemy suffered heavy losses.

On 18 April the Regiment, crossing the fateful Heath,[3] thrust on via Melzen, where 500 British prisoners of war were liberated, towards Luneburg; and on the following day—the twenty-second day of their 200-mile advance—they reached the Elbe. It called for a celebration; and of all things fortunate, here was a store of wine. (It turned out, on closer investigation, to be castor-oil.)

Now the task was to capture the Luneburg Bridge, the only one in the British sector to remain unbroken. The Regiment's efforts to do this involved the K.S.L.I. in one of the bitterest battles of the whole advance. The ground short of the river was a maze of dykes and streams over which all the bridges had been blown; and here the Germans made a stubborn stand. Tanks and mortars barred the way, while flak guns on the farther bank raked the approaches with their fire.

By midday (19 April) the infantry were pinned to the ground. Captain A. N. Bicket of I Battery drove his tank forward in full view to aid them, only to find it hopelessly bogged.

Still determined to bring down fire on either side of the bridge, to prevent the Germans from blowing it, he alighted and crawled forward; but the bridge had been prepared for demolition and at 1500 hours it was blown.

Bicket then turned his guns on to the enemy flak positions and much reduced their fire, but smoke from burning farms so obscured his vision that he had to edge his way close to the enemy machine-gun posts before he could get a view. There, ignoring the danger, he carried on, giving the infantry supporting fire that saved them many casualties. He received the Military Cross for his day's work.

Gunner Tait went forward as his signaller, carrying a No. 18 wireless set. The operator of the infantry set was killed and his set wrecked. Tait's set became the only link with the forward company—a link which, despite the shelling, despite the fact that he was at times waist-deep in water, he kept in operation for thirteen hours, earning, by his dauntless cheerfulness, the Military Medal.

It was ten days before 11 Armoured Division crossed the Elbe. Meanwhile they had moved to Breitlingen, to aid 15 (Scottish) Division in clearing the southern bank. On 29 April they fired 200 rounds per gun to support that Division as they made the crossing, and next morning, 29 Armoured Brigade leading, 11 Armoured Division passed through the Scots in a dash—a "brilliant dash", as General Eisenhower says in his book[4]—for Lubeck, which was reached on 2 May.

On the eve of final victory, the last items had still to be added to the Regiment's casualty list. Gunner A. Bulman fell that day to a sniper's bullet; and in the evening an enemy plane, wrecking the Signals office, the M.O.'s half-track, the cooks' three-tonner and the Adjutant's jeep, killed Gunner H. Stansbury and Corporal

W. R. Robinson, and Signalmen R. J. Bentham and W. Connell of the Royal Corps of Signals. Two more men were wounded.

The end was approaching, amid scenes of amazement. On the autobahn outside Lubeck G Battery in a single night took 600 prisoners, including a U-boat commander and his crew; 800 surrendered to I Battery; in all the Division took 15,000 that day, and had hardly time to dispose of them when orders came for a move to Zarpen, north of the city.

Here, at the uttermost end of their victorious march, the Regiment came in for a final exhibition of Nazi frightfulness, when enemy aircraft did some sporadic bombing—without result.

At 0800 hours on 4 May all enemy resistance ended. At Field-Marshal Montgomery's Tactical Headquarters on Luneburg Heath Admiral von Friedeburg and other representatives of the German High Command signed an armistice providing for the surrender next morning of all German forces in North-West Germany, Denmark and Holland.

Three days later, in General Eisenhower's Headquarters at Rheims, the same envoy, with Colonel-General Jodl, signed the surrender of all German forces on all fronts. At midnight 8/9 May the war in Europe was over.

This is the end of 13 Regiment's story; but there came, in June, an appropriate sequel.

Few leaders had better exemplified the maxim "know your enemy" than Lieut.-Colonel R. B. T. Daniell. Stationed in Cairo at the outbreak of war with Italy, he had seen the development of desert fighting from its primitive, care-free beginnings to its triumphant conclusion; first as Battery Commander, M Battery, 3 R.H.A., later in command of his Regiment. He was Second-in-Command 107 (South Notts Hussars) Regiment R.H.A. at the siege of Tobruk in 1941 and when they made their famous stand in the Cauldron. He commanded 4 Field Regiment at Alamein.

When 13 Regiment went to France, therefore, it was under the leadership of an officer who knew as much about Panzer technique and tactics as any gunner in the Service. The award of a bar to his D.S.O., won in the Desert, was a fitting acknowledgment.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

[1] Another H.A.C. man made a welcome reappearance about this time—Brigadier Phayre, posted as C.R.A. to 11 Armoured Division; formerly B.C. H Battery.

[2] Major Charles Chapman, commanding the Light Anti-Aircraft Battery accompanying the Regiment, was in charge of part of Belsen camp for three days after its liberation. His stories of the horrors he found there were beyond belief—or would have been, had they not been verified beyond doubt by abundant evidence, equally reliable: witness a senior officer of 7 Armoured Division: "No pictures or words can ever adequately portray the horror of what I saw. Of the 40,000 or 60,000 political prisoners of all nationalities, one could only hope for a quick death for the majority. The awful cloying stench of death was everywhere. There were piles of dead bodies, mere bags of bones from years of systematic starvation, but worst of all was the animal look and habits of so many of the prisoners still alive; all spark of human intellect seemed to have departed. The haunting memory of it will be with me till my dying day."

[3] Scene of the final surrender to Field-Marshal Montgomery.

[4] "Crusade in Europe."

86 (H.A.C.) HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT ROYAL ARTILLERY

1. “IN FIELDS OF AIR THEY WRITE THEIR NAME”

March 1939—2 *June* 1944

THE throng of officers and men who swarmed in and around Armoury House in March 1939, when word went forth that the H.A.C. were raising an Anti-Aircraft Regiment, had little inkling of the diversified future which lay ahead of them. They were about to join a unit, 86 (H.A.C.) H.A.A. Regiment R.A., which would be first among the H.A.C. to open fire on the Germans (not yet our declared enemy).

They were destined, those who remained with the Regiment, to serve five years of trying, often exasperating warfare in the defence of Britain from air attack, and nine months of campaigning as variegated as even the versatile Royal Artillery reckons to embark upon. During that spell overseas, they were to function as light and heavy anti-aircraft, as anti-tank, coast defence and field gunners, and even as infantry: not to mention spells of heavy but less martial labour.

Those who did not remain with the Regiment were to proceed as officers to every branch of the Service and every theatre of war: for in their first year of existence alone the Regiment were to provide 801 officers, either by way of Officer Cadet Training Units or by direct commissions—a figure almost equal to their total war establishment.[1]

Speculations as to their future role weighed little, however, upon the minds of the aspirants, against other considerations. The recruiting authorities no longer regarded candidates of 31 and over as fit only for bath chairs. The Court of Assistants, winnowing, in virtually permanent session, several thousand applications, had a welcoming nod for veteran members of the H.A.C., or ex-members, or indeed for anybody with some experience of soldiering.

The medical examination, moreover, could hardly be described as exacting. ("Can you see me? Can you hear me? You'll do.")

Officering the new unit presented little difficulty. What posts the H.A.C. Reserve of Officers could not cover could be filled without hesitation by members promoted from the ranks of the active list. Of the original officers, one, Captain G. H. Champness, was in due course to command the Regiment; two others—Major F. Mills, M.C. (274 Battery), and Major J. F. Young (275 Battery), as well as Captain A. D. G. Courage, the Adjutant—were later to command other artillery regiments and one (Major T. Smith, 273 Battery) to become a Brigadier.

It need hardly be said that there was virtually no equipment for the newly-raised unit; and the casual observer might well have thought there was no room for them. Drill hall and grounds were already crowded to capacity by the expanding batteries and the growing Battalion, not to mention their guests of the Rough Riders who had insinuated themselves into a corner of the Artillery Garden where they sported with a mysterious contrivance called the Bofors. However, Colonel C. B. Broome, 86 Regiment's first Commander, was not entirely without influence at Armoury House, and by turn and turn about the old building managed to accommodate even this addition to its astonishing variety of martial activity.

Thus when, on the approach of war, the Regiment[2] found themselves deployed, and the subject of much civilian curiosity, in gun positions as varied as Hyde Park and Hackney Marshes, Primrose Hill and the Isle of Dogs, they had already achieved some semblance of an anti-aircraft unit.

By a Box-and-Cox arrangement they were able to handle the guns and predictors in these sites while the rightful owners were in practice camp. When, on 3 September 1939, the declaration of war was followed, at 1120 hours, by a 10-minute air-raid warning, in which nobody fired at anything because there was nothing to fire at, 86 Regiment felt their period of apprenticeship was drawing to a close.

On 15 September 1939 they moved their Headquarters to Loughton, and thenceforwards for more than two years the Batteries were in action—equipped successively with 3-in., 4.5-in. and 3.7-in. guns—around the northern and eastern approaches to London; their activities diversified by that operation without which no genuine war is complete, the guarding of Vulnerable Points.

It was a business of constant changes of station and changes of mind. No sooner was a gun position dug and concreted and sandbagged and generally in apple-pie order than Higher Authority decided that the future conduct of the war demanded its being either moved 100 yards to the flank, or handed over to another unit whose views on gun-pit construction differed widely from those of the H.A.C.

There were some departures, during the closing months of 1939, for commissioned service in other units which (fond hope!) would be less bothered about by Higher Authority; but the prevailing feeling in those early days was that the best chance of seeing active service lay in sticking to the Regiment. It was only after the stirring events of 1940 that the trickle of applicants for commissions developed into a landslide.[3]

Into the war diaries there intrudes in November 1939 the word "Immatures". It is a label which, for tactlessness, the dullest soul in the War Office could hardly have bettered. These were mainly lads, under age for foreign service, whose units had gone overseas and left them behind. Of all recruits the Company has gathered in this or earlier wars, these were probably the only ones who—at all events on joining—hated the Honourable Artillery Company and everything connected with it.

Many, despite their youth, were keen and competent Territorial Army field gunners. They loathed anti-aircraft gunnery. They had parted with their friends. Of varied social backgrounds, but mostly, apart from that, in the school-leaving-age-cum-apprenticeship income group, they found themselves in a unit whose official transport was reinforced by a fleet of private cars varying—in inverse proportion, as was said, to the seniority of the owners—from Bentleys and Lagondas to baby Austins. Worst of all, these youths found that their room-mates were mostly on the verge of senility, having an average age around 35.

A great deal of kindly effort was exerted to make the lads feel at home, and interest them in whatever new equipment was to hand. (This varied from brand new 3.7 mobile guns in which, before Higher Authority snatched them away, the Regiment took an extravagant pride, to outfits whose highlights were no more ambitious than Lewis machine-guns.)

The experiment, the difficulties of which almost everyone could have foreseen, had at first a deleterious effect on some of the more lordly of the H.A.C. other ranks, who came to regard the lads as potential batmen and to dodge such menial tasks as barrack-room scrubbing and potato peeling by tipping the youngsters to stand-in for them. It was not long, however, before the new entry had settled down. Many of them in due course became senior N.C.O.s, and remained with the Regiment until the end, as proud of its traditions as the original members.

A personality whom all the Regiment will remember from those training days was Captain W. H. Dobson. He had been 33 years with the Grenadier Guards; eight years as Regimental Sergeant Major at Sandhurst. Among his four rows of medals he included the M.B.E., and the M.C. and M.M. won in the first World War.

When 86 Regiment were formed, he had joined as civilian clerk; but his was no light to be hid under a bushel, and before long he was functioning as Captain and Quartermaster. When their knees had ceased to quake at the terrifying roar which greeted any sign of slovenliness—it rose to its most fearsome crescendo when any Guardsman, passing an officer of the H.A.C., failed to accord a correct salute—he won the Regiment's affectionate regard.

They were as disappointed as he when it became clear that gout, toughly combated after each spell of "hard lying", was going to make it impossible for him to accompany them overseas. Transferring, sadly, to the easier life of a practice camp, he continued in the Service for two years after V.E. day, finishing as Quartermaster to the Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms.

Still, except on the ranges, the Regiment had not fired a shot when in May 1940 Lieut.-Colonel B. C. Trappes-Lomax took over command from Colonel Broome on his transfer to the T.A. Reserve of Officers.

They had not, however, long to wait. On 22 August 273 Battery, from Hackney Marshes, fired their first rounds—10 rounds—in action, when a lone raider crossed their expanse of sky. Thirteen days later the blitz on London began with a Luftwaffe attack in strength. Sixty-five enemy aircraft came over.

For three days, under instructions from above, the impatient gunners held their fire. Orders were to engage no enemy unless it had been picked up by the searchlights, so that height-finders and predictors might function. At last, to the relief of the batteries and of Londoners in general, Higher Authority (in the person of Mr. Winston Churchill himself) intervened.

Thenceforth the nightly attack, carried out by, on the average, 200 German bombers, gave the batteries full scope for letting fly; and on the night 9/10 September 275 Battery, firing from Wanstead, scored their first authenticated success, previous claims by 273 Battery, to have brought down bombers from Buckhurst Hill on 7 September and again on 9 September, having been classed as doubtful ("not officially confirmed").

Sporadic attacks, by day as well as night, followed on the temporary cessation of the regular blitz, and on 7 November 1940 the Regiment sustained their first casualties in action when an unexploded A.A. shell fell in a gun-pit of 274 Battery at Lippits Hill, wounding four men, one of whom, Gunner W. D. Thoms, later died of his injuries.

The newly-formed 383 Battery, under Major G. H. Champness, now joined the Regiment, from whom most of their senior personnel had been drawn. Lieut.-Colonel Trappes-Lomax, having been appointed Commander II Corps Medium Artillery, was succeeded in the command of the Regiment by Lieut.-Colonel J. G. S. Ross.

There was a second batch of casualties, this time from direct enemy action, on 31 December 1940, when a single enemy raider dropped a bomb on 275 Battery's position at Buckhurst Hill, injuring four other ranks working on the gun-laying receiver. On 20 April 1941 the Regiment had their first man killed by enemy action (Gunner A. W. Boxell) when a land-mine was dropped at Loughton Hall. Nine other ranks were wounded.

In January 1942 the Regiment moved to the south-western sector of London's anti-aircraft defences, with Regimental H.Q. at Cobham. Two months later they came for the first time under the eye of their Captain General, when a detachment marched past the King and Queen during Windsor War Weapons Week.

In April, on the promotion of Lieut-Colonel Ross, an officer was appointed to command the Regiment who was destined to lead them throughout the remainder of their active service, at home and overseas—Lieut.-Colonel G. H. Champness: an old member of the H.A.C. who had entered the Infantry Battalion in 1926.

Under him they began wanderings over almost the full extent of the United Kingdom compared with which the journeyings of the Israelites were a bee-line: sometimes on operational duties (as in Dumbarton, where they helped to man the Clyde defences); sometimes on training of all conceivable kinds—infantry work at Colchester, sea-target practice at Ramsgate: all of which was to come in handy when they encountered the varied tasks which were to face them overseas.

Wethersfield in Essex, Clacton, Canterbury, Blandford, Portsmouth, Barrhead, Limpsfield and innumerable practice camps, visited a battery at a time, gave them a comprehensive knowledge of British topography and a good deal of practice in packing; till, at Southampton on 28 February 1944, their future took definite shape as they came under the eagle eye of General Montgomery, when he weighed up the unit who were before long to fight under his command in Normandy.

A "flap" of more than ordinary proportions marked their stay here. Most of their equipment was in pieces for overhaul; the men were billeted all over the town; Lieut.-Colonel Champness was busy in the Isle of Wight, planning in company with the Canadians, when sudden orders came to go into action at once for the A.A. defence of Swanage.

Theirs not to reason why: and in any case nobody knew; at all events, nobody was telling. They found themselves with a grandstand view of the bombardment of Studland Bay by air, land and sea; and, as the official train departed, learned that they had been protecting, from sudden enemy inquisitiveness, Mr. Churchill, General Eisenhower and General Montgomery.

The Regiment—now comprising 273, 274 and 383 Batteries—assembled in May in their last English camping place at Aveley.

Few remembered the name: but it was here that, nearly 30 years earlier, 1 Battalion H.A.C. had been issued at dead of night with new-fangled rifles and the incomprehensible armful of web

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OPPOSITE

H.A.C. NATIONAL DEFENCE COMPANIES: 13 (H.D.) BATTALION,
ROYAL FUSILIERS

H.M. The King with Lieut.-Col. J. Bamford Smith.

equipment which, in a few hectic hours, they were to assemble and don before boarding the *Westmeath* for France.

On 2 June 86 Regiment embarked in landing craft at Tilbury, bound for the Norman shore.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

[1] Altogether the Regiment produced 1019 officers, including 138 to the Infantry, 28 to the Royal Armoured Corps and nine to the Royal Air Force. Of these 47 fell in action.

[2] The original components were 273, 274 and 275 Batteries. 275 Battery were transferred in October 1941 to 118 and later to 165 H.A.A. Regiment. On 14 November 1940, 383 Battery were formed under Major G. H. Champness, and in September 1941, 446 Battery, commanded by Major A. Mills, M.C. (ex A Battery), were also incorporated, leaving 86 Regiment, however, in July 1942.

[3] Coming when they did, these departures caught Regimental H.Q. on the wrong foot. Cooks, batmen and medical orderlies hastily transformed themselves into gun numbers to fill the gaps as the first major air raids began, and thus carried on until reinforcements had been posted and trained.

OPPOSITE

LEFT: *The Old Sweat. Private J. G. Gibson, M.B.E., T.D., National Defence Company. Admitted 1900, Corporal 1902, Sergeant 1905, Commissioned August 1914. To France with 1 Battalion, September 1914. Officer i/c Records, London, 1922-35. His father served in the Regiment from 1880 to 1920, rising from Private to Major. His two sons also served with the Regiment, one in the Infantry, one in A.A.*

RIGHT: *"A natural soldier." Major M. J. V. Perry*(k), *B.C. F Battery.*

BELOW: *The Colonel Commandant with officers of 86 (H.A.C.) H.A.A. Regt., 18 July 1941.*

FRONT: *Rev. Cyril Perrot, C.F.(R.C.), Major-General R. F. E. Whittaker, G.O.C. 1 A.A. Division, Col. Lord Galway, Colonel Commandant, Lt.-Col. J. G. S. Ross, commanding 86 Regt. (November 1940—April 1942).*

CENTRE: *Major P. Hodder-Williams, W. A. Clark*(k), *Major F. Mills, Major F. D. Williamson, Rev. J. C. T. Downes, C.F.*

BACK: *Capt. T. Lubin-Silverston, Lieut. Sankaraya, R.A.M.C., Capt. J. A. Tallent, Lieut. (Q.M.) W. H. Dobson, Lieut. L. Shillingford, Capt. G. Illingworth, Major C. A. J. Whyte, Capt. H. G. Balfour, Capt. Anderson, R.A.M.C., 2/Lieut. A. Duncan.*

2. ACCORDING TO PLAN

D Day—August 1944

Three hundred thousand soldiers landed on the five Allied beaches during D Day and the five days that followed; more than a thousand fighting units each with their own task to perform.

For each man, for each unit, the occasion, unique in the history of the world, was fraught with its especial medley of emotions; blend of exhilaration and anxiety, exasperation and some measure of astonishment; seasoned, for some rare souls, with flashes of appreciation that the grimmest of battles may have even comic moments.

It was 86 Regiment's part in the grand plan to disembark with 3 Canadian Division, on Juno, the easternmost but one of the five assault beaches.

To the least imaginative of the men who waited on their landing craft, watching the plan unfold which, in their practice landings, they had learned—almost—by heart, it was comfortingly obvious that, by and large, things were going "as ordered". But only by and large. Of the million events that were happening around them not everything could go right.

As their small flotilla of 12 landing craft chugged towards the Normandy shore, with not another craft in sight except an occassional enquiring destroyer or M.T.B., it looked to 86 Regiment H.Q. as though they alone were about to carry out the invasion.

Any anxieties on this score were quickly replaced by another misgiving, quickly developing into a certainty. The tablets of hyoscine hydrobromide (called by the troops by more colloquial and less scientific names) served out to all ranks were not infallible preventives of sea sickness. Indeed the authorities can hardly have thought them so, when they issued simultaneously brown-paper holdalls ominously labelled "bags vomit".

When, at dawn on D Day, they saw the beaches just ahead, it became obvious that they were *not* the only participants. As far as the eye could see, the coast was fringed with hundreds of craft of all shapes and sizes.

A five-force westerly wind (17-21 knots) was sending five-foot waves over the bows of the low-laden ships. More than that, it had driven the tide over this particular beach several feet higher than was normal, so that craft beached—with surprisingly small toll—slap through, or over, the mine-laden steel knife-rests and spikes which, "according to plan", would have been cleared by the earliest onrush of amphibious tanks and the Royal Engineers' armoured vehicles.[1] Lieut.-Colonel Champness, coming ashore from his L.C.T., saw the craft on either side go up on these mines—without, however, any apparent casualties.

In a way the extra high tide, at this particular spot, where reefs of rock fringed the beach, served the invaders well. Not so the mist which, in early morning, had hindered observation, causing the warships' fire and the preliminary bombing by Allied aircraft to fall a little behind the coastal strongpoints instead of on them.

This, and the dislocations due to the weather, gave the enemy garrisons time to recover.

At Bernières the tide was so high that the Queen's Own Regiment were carried to within 100 yards of the cover of the high sea wall; but they had to make their initial landing without the help of the D.D. tanks, for it was too rough for these to be swum ashore; and so heavy was the shell, mortar and machine-gun fire poured on that 100 yards of beach that the Battalion had lost half their strength before they reached the comparative safety of the wall. None the less, within an hour they had stormed the strongpoint with the aid of a rocket ship which, running itself almost aground, had poured its fire into the defences.

By 0828, when the reconnaissance parties of 86 Regiment began to disembark on Mike beach—at exactly the spot planned three months before and two minutes before the appointed time—Bernières beach was clear of Germans, except for ever-increasing groups of disconsolate-looking prisoners awaiting embarkation in L.S.T.s. Casualties had been re-embarked. Enemy shelling, such as it was, was falling, half of it, into the sea. Standing on the sea-wall, a corporal of Military Police was directing the queue of visitors regardless of occasional bursts of machine-gun fire, as nonchalantly as if he had been controlling traffic in Piccadilly Circus.

The C.O. spent an eventful day reconnoitring a site for the A.A. Operations Room, R.H.Q. and gun positions, meeting Battery recce parties and—most tricky of his tasks—finding a sandpit in which he could tuck away the bulky but vital T 14 early-warning radar equipment which, too tall to go into a L.S.T., had been ferried across in a Rhino.

The Regiment de la Chaudière had burst through the seaside fringe of houses, to find themselves held up for two hours by 88-mm. guns, firing down the road leading through orchards and cornfields to Beny-sur-mer (which, despite its title, lies three miles inland).

The accuracy of the enemy's fire, especially from the coast defence guns, had been much improved—another small circumstance that had not been reckoned on—by the line of barrage balloons which had been towed to the coast by ships at the very start of the attack, to circumvent intrusion by enemy aircraft until our A.A. batteries could be got into position.

To the chagrin of all those who had spent so much care in organising the barrage, the balloons had to be cut adrift. 86 Regiment, who had a squadron of balloons under their own command, were never allowed to fly them.

Still another exasperation faced 86 Regiment when Lieut. Peter Blaylock, chafing to get ashore with his jeep and reconnoitre his gun position, found that there were difficulties in loading the Rhino ferry, the huge raft which was to get the tanks and guns ashore from the landing ship.

Only the tank deck could, for the time being, be unloaded. However, he begged a lift from a tank squadron and, landing in a Sherman, made his way to the exact area allotted for B Troop. It was scattered with enemy mines; which just had to be lifted as necessary.

Major Bill Clark had also got ashore and the two noted, among the seeming chaos of the beaches, their gun sites. But the guns were not yet disembarked, and all the two officers, with Sergeant Edmondson, could find from their constant enquiries at Beach H.Q. was that they would not be landed before the early hours of D+2. Even then it was anybody's guess on which section of the beach, Dan or Mike, they would land.

Suddenly, as they prospected Dan, a hot burst of machine-gun fire sent them to cover. One of them, however, machine-gun fire or no, had to take a look at Mike beach, to be ready with a position in case the guns landed there. They tossed for it, and Blaylock set out.

That evening Major Clark was killed by an anti-personnel bomb—a bitter loss to the Regiment who knew him as a born leader and, to all ranks, a splendid friend. Another air-raid casualty of D Day was Sergeant H. Wright, radar sergeant of 383 Battery.

By the early hours of D+2 the seeming confusion on the beach was resolving itself. Guns had disembarked at both beaches—the Mike contingent headed by Captain "Dumbo" Atkins, wading ashore perched unsteadily on his overloaded jeep through five feet of rough water, a sight which raised a smile even at this hectic moment.

It was hectic indeed. Landing guns from Rhino ferries was the one operation 86 Regiment had not practised, at all events under the conditions which prevailed on Juno beach. As the towing vehicles came over the top of the ramp's steep incline, the gun pintles snapped at the sudden strain, leaving them to be manhandled separately down the slope.

By a marvellous effort, R.E.M.E. Beach Workshops overcame the difficulty in a matter of hours, welding on new pintles so securely that they lasted throughout the campaign.

Several enemy air raids had swept over the beach before the Regiment's guns could be put in action—not a fraction of what had been expected, for by day the Allied command of the air was virtually unchallenged.

On the evening of D Day a number of J.U.88 plastered the beach fairly heavily, dropping, in addition to H.E., bombs of a mysterious kind. Light Anti-Aircraft units tackled them, aided by terrific bursts of fire from the ships. Two Me 109s also made a hasty swoop, chased for their lives by Allied fighters.

The unknown type of bomb which the enemy aircraft dropped intrigued the Regiment, especially as the majority of them failed to explode. Peter Blaylock and Sergeant Nash, finding one in a hedge next day, were in process of removing it, with due care, to the pit where they had dumped a number of them, when it suddenly began to discharge sparks and flame. Hastily laying it down, they crawled backwards on their stomachs expecting it to explode at any moment.

Like a giant firework it continued to blaze; but there was no bang. To their infinite relief they discovered these were incendiary bombs; and before long Lieut. Stevens, who, his troop being already in action, had time to spare, had found a way of removing fuze and detonator and rendering the bombs safe.

For nearly a month 86 Regiment with the other A.A. units of the Brigade kept the beaches under their protection, ensconcing themselves between raids in dug-outs as deep as they could manage; for the beaches were still commanded by one long-range gun in particular from Merville away to the east. Emerging (as was afterwards discovered) from a tunnel, it fired its ration of two shells per beach per night, costing the Regiment a generator before its position was plotted and the gun silenced.

From the strong point at Douvres-la Delivrande, where an enemy garrison held out in their deep dug-outs, there came, each evening at 1700 hours precisely, a burst of mortar fire.

Bombing at night was fairly regular and, for the first three weeks, heavy; but by daytime virtually nil. A slight contretemps with a certain Light A.A. unit, in which the Regiment were in no way concerned, led to General Dempsey being forced down and put in an extemporised guard room until his identity had been checked. The sequel was an order that the A.A. gunners should not open fire by day.

At night it was "free for all". They could shoot at any aircraft which came within range: but here, too, they soon learned discretion, as it became clear that quite a few of the aircraft which passed overhead were Allied planes making for home.

Though in their spell on the beaches the Brigade managed to account for 87 enemy aircraft, other work was now awaiting them. Around Caen, where 13 Regiment were playing their part, Second Army were locked in fierce fighting with the flower of the German Panzer divisions. On 3 July, 86 Regiment came into action against ground targets.

Linking again with the 5.5 gun-howitzers of the Scottish Horse, with whom they had soldiered in Scotland the year before, 383 Battery were set the task of neutralising a wood, some 300 yards square, on the edge of Carpiquet airfield, just west of Caen.

In position some three miles north of their target, their guns fired 800 rounds air-burst in 20 minutes and Lieut.-Colonel Champness was satisfied to note that all enemy activity in the target region ceased forthwith.

A few days later their attention was called to some German goings-on across the Orne, where the enemy, despite the British airborne landings behind them, still clung to positions at the river mouth. From a survey O.P. on a concrete tower on Ouistreham beach Lieut.-Colonel Champness and his officers, delighted at the change of occupation, directed one-gun shoots day after day at enemy installations over the river.

Again 383 Battery were called into a field role. The Falaise Pocket had been closed; and had been burst open again for a few hours on 20 August while Hausser's 2 Panzer Corps, bumper to bumber, ran the gauntlet of the Allied Air Force's bombing and struggled through.

Then it had closed finally around 50,000 German prisoners. On 21 August Hausser turned in an unavailing attempt to hack a way past the Poles at Chambois and re-open the narrow neck through which he had just escaped. The Poles, cut off for a spell, stood and fought till their ammunition was gone (but fresh supplies came opportunely by air).

Meanwhile, 6 Airborne Division, from their bridgehead east of the Orne, harried the German flank. Temporarily under command of 60 H.A.A. Regiment, 383 Battery had their part in this; firing as field guns and delighting their airborne comrades by the accuracy of their air bursts.

For a while the fighting was confused. At one moment they found themselves in front of their leading infantry. But on 22 August the Panzers were ordered to give up the struggle and join in a general retreat. For 10 days 383 Battery helped them on their way.

While the great battles of Normandy were in progress—the struggle in the Bocage; the overwhelming of the German forces in the Falaise Pocket; while Paris was freed; while British armour was sweeping into Antwerp and the Americans were reaching towards the Moselle, the other Batteries of 86 Regiment kept watch over the beaches.

Still, with far-distant Cherbourg, these beaches formed the main channel through which supplies for the 2,000,000 men of the advancing Armies must flow. (The one surviving Mulberry Harbour alone had its quota of nearly 7000 tons of stores a day.)

Our anchorages were within range of Le Havre's 16-inch and 11-inch guns. Heavily concreted submarine pens still survived in the port; and though it was tolerably certain that, before being ejected, the Germans would do their best to wreck the installations, still Le Havre offered, once it could be restored, a vast addition to the Allies' landing facilities.

NOTE TO CHAPTER TWO

[1] Early in their planning, the troops had been assured by General Montgomery that the spikes with which the beaches were lined ("Rommel's asparagus") were not mined. Such was the report of Sergeant Bruce Ogden Smith H.A.C. (attached Commandos), brother of Lieut. Colin Ogden Smith, late of 86 Regiment (killed in action as a Major attached to the Special Air Service). Bruce, the only one of three brothers who had not taken a commission, had swum ashore from a submarine to ascertain this. A few days before D Day, in another gallant expedition of the same kind, he had reversed this finding, and all ranks were notified accordingly. Bruce Ogden Smith won both the Military Medal and the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his daring exploits.

3. COASTGUARD

August—October 1944

On 30 August Canadian First Army, crossing the Seine at Elbeuf and other points downstream, sent 2 Canadian Division racing north to capture Dieppe, where so much Canadian blood had been shed on 19 August 1942.

It was General Montgomery's special forethought that enabled them to snatch this sweet revenge; his plan, too, that 51 (Highland) Division should clear, in St. Valery, a score they had come 10,000 miles to settle.[1] That task over, they swung round to join 49 Division in investing Le Havre.

There was to be no mistake about the capture of Le Havre; and there was certainly no mistake about 86 Regiment's part in it. Their task, to deploy in a coast defence role to prevent the enemy escaping by sea; to neutralise the German anti-aircraft defences while for a week Allied aircraft delivered 11,000 tons of high explosive on the city.

Of their coast defence role nothing need be said; the garrison made no attempt to escape by sea. The business of silencing the A.A. batteries was carried out with precision. Deluging the enemy gun positions with air-burst fired from Honfleur, across the water, they made it possible for successive waves of Allied aircraft to deliver their bombs in daylight, undisturbed, from 3000 feet.

Only three times during the week did the German batteries open up—the first time against 86 Regiment's gun positions. They did no damage except to one O.P., where some instruments were smashed. What the Regiment did to the Germans was clear when, after the assault, Lieut.-Colonel Champness inspected the enemy gun positions. They were strewn with shell fragments.

On 10 September the assault went in, heralded by a final air attack and a bombardment from the battleship *Warspite* and the monitor *Erebus*. As he reached the high ground overlooking the harbour, one infantry company commander came upon a dug-out where the telephone was still in working order. In his best German he asked to be put through to the commander of the Garrison.

"Had you not better surrender?" he asked. The invitation was declined, but (the account says) the German general added, with a hollow laugh, "Perhaps we may meet again".

In two days from the onset the rubble-strewn city was in British hands and 7000 Germans had laid down their arms.

Meanwhile at Rouen 274 Battery had been guarding the river crossings. On 11 September 86 Regiment joined the victory-flushed armies streaming north-east, moving via Totes to Dieppe. Here once more they were deployed in the dual role of coast defence and anti-aircraft. It was expected that motor torpedo boats might attempt, by night, to wreck the now active harbour; but none ventured within range.

It was not an easy time. Every vehicle and driver the authorities could lay hands on had been commandeered to help in rushing stores from Cherbourg to the battle area—a 1000-mile round trip which was wearing out men and vehicles—and every other available man was set unloading ammunition in the docks.

With unfeigned joy the Regiment learned in mid-October a threefold piece of good news.

They were to move nearer the battle line. They were to be issued with new equipment—American radar and predictors, the latest of their kind. And they were to begin a fresh phase in their operational career, offering greater scope for their technical skill than any they had hitherto known. On 15 October they marched east, via Blangy, St. Omer, Audenarde[2] to Santhoven (Zandhoven) 10 miles east of Antwerp.

While other anti-aircraft units were finding, except at odd places and at odd moments, their normal occupation gone—such was the Allied command of the air—80 A.A. Brigade, which 86 Regiment now joined, had been faced with a new task which was to keep them at full stretch for 154 days and nights.

Though Antwerp had been taken on 4 September—and taken so swiftly that the port was virtually in working order—no effort had been made to gain command of the 70-mile channel which lay between Antwerp and the sea. It was perhaps the most notable blunder perpetrated throughout the entire war by a High Command distinguished above all others for far-sighted planning.[3] The German divisions garrisoning the mouth of the Scheldt were demoralised by the suddenness of the British armoured thrust. Their coast defences were undermanned.

Now they had had a month to reinforce. Their morale was recovered. Every gun detachment was on the *qui vive.*

From 3 October—when 243 Lancasters breached with their bombs the Westkapelle sea wall and trapped the German garrisons in flooded Walcheren (it was the bright idea of Lieut.-General Guy Simonds, the Gunner Commander of II Canadian Corps)—until 6 November, when a lieutenant of the Royal Scots (disguised, for the sake of etiquette, as a lieut.-colonel) received the surrender of the German general, the Canadians, with the lively aid of 52 (Lowland) Division, buffalo-borne British Commandos, Dutch and French contingents, had fought a bloody, waterlogged, ditch-to-ditch campaign up through the South Beveland peninsula and across the Scheldt.

That done—it had cost more than 27,000 casualties—100 minesweepers had cleared the channel to the sea. It was 28 November before the first supply convoy could sail in.

Long before this, however, it had become obvious to the Germans that the Allies meant to have Antwerp: and that by and large not the most stubborn defence would prevent them. Then the new war-winning weapons that had laid London in ruins and crushed the spirit of Britain (though only Goebbels and Lord Haw-Haw really believed this[4]) must be turned on Antwerp: so that when the Allies had won, not only the port itself—with its 30 miles of wharves, 632 cranes, 186 acres of sheds and oil storage for 100 million gallons—but the channel of entry, they would find it useless and untenable.

"Secretly, in dozens of wooded places east and south-east of Antwerp, frenzied building of V1 launching sites began—not, however, unknown to Allied intelligence."[5]

Hastily and secretly, the Allies prepared their answer. It took the form of Antwerp X; in which, on 18 October 1944, 86 Regiment joined.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

[1] In June 1940 the bulk of the Division, pinned in a corner at St. Valery, cut off from the sea by a curtain of gunfire, their ammunition gone, had passed into captivity with their Commander. Few outbursts of joy in liberated France exceeded that of the St. Valery folk when they heard the pipes again.

[2] The Regiment were too busy for meditations on military history: but certain of the elect recollected that, under the more familiar name of Oudenarde, this had been the scene, in 1708, of a galloping battle which marked an old H.A.C. man as one of the greatest captains of history; an unpremeditated fight with tired troops, with their backs to a river; which Marlborough took on because he judged—rightly—that his men had one more kick left than had the enemy.

[3] See page 276.

[4] London had endured its first V1 attack on the night 12/13 June, when a single bomb—one of seven launched—fell in the capital. Three days later the attack began in earnest, when 244 flying bombs were launched. On 8 September the first V2 landed in London.

[5] "The Story of Antwerp X."

4. TEN-SECONDS READINESS

24 October 1944—18 *April* 1945

86 Regiment's first two weeks in defence of Antwerp were spent east of the port, with 383 Battery at Zoersel, 273 at Pulderbosch, 274 at Nijlen and R.H.Q. at Santhoven: the whole under operational command of 30 A.A.A. Group of the U.S. Army (Colonel Russell).

On 24 October the attack on Antwerp began, mainly from the south-east: and though on 1 November 274 Battery shot down two V1s it was soon clear that the Regiment's normal equipment, adequate for anti-aircraft work, was not clever enough to tackle flying bombs with a wing-spread of only 17 feet, flying low at a speed which sometimes reached 450 miles an hour.

Already some 30 a day were approaching Antwerp. Before long V2s, also, began to land in or near the city. Against them there was admittedly no defence: but they were far outnumbered by the V1s. These the defenders of Antwerp, under the command of Brigadier General Clare Armstrong, U.S. Army, set themselves to tackle—22,000 officers and men, Americans, British and Polish, with 209 American 90-mm. and 128 British 3.7 guns, plus lighter weapons and searchlights and every radar device then known.

Methods and equipment were modified with typical American celerity and with amazing success. By the end of their five months' campaign they could claim that, of 2394 V1 bombs aimed at Antwerp, only 211 got through to the city. Of the rest, 648 were destroyed harmlessly in mid-air, while 1535 crashed in open fields short of their target as a result of A.A. fire.

Their new equipment complete—the S.C.R. 584 and the No. 10 Predictor were the main items—86 Regiment were withdrawn to Ninove and Haaltaert, west of Brussels, to learn their new job. By 19 November they were adept enough to take their place, at Tirlemont (Tienen) east of Brussels, in defence of that city, and were much encouraged to see an American battery, newly arrived alongside, shoot down a V1 which crashed at Herenthout, 28 miles north, and well off its course.

Though their task at the moment was the defence of Brussels, they were in the south-eastern corridor along which up to 50 bombs per day were heading for Antwerp; so that even when not under command of Antwerp X they were actually sharing its task.

It was a new technique, interesting—and exhausting. Sited for preference on an upward slope, the guns picked up targets at 8-10,000 yards and took them on at 5-6000 yards ground range. That gave them, with a bomb of average speed, 15 to 16 seconds to fire their first round and some 40 seconds to bring the bomb down before it went out of range.

By day and night the detachments were on one minute's notice: 10 seconds, when things were busy.

Some of the bombs climbed when they were hit. Some circled. Some dived. Some dropped like a stone. Some continued on course upside down and losing height. Some crashed in fragments; some bounced once or twice before exploding. But whichever eccentric course it took, each man felt, for a few tense moments, that the maimed bomb was heading direct for him.

Enacted as many as 100 times in 24 hours, the drama could become somewhat wearing.

Between 1 November and 14 March, when the storm, risen to a crescendo in February, had begun to abate (there was a final half-hearted resumption, ending for good on 30 March) the Regiment shot down 78 "divers" at a cost of 9600 rounds. Only one did, in fact, land in their midst. It fell in the wagon lines of C Troop, 274 Battery, killing Gunner A. Young, wounding three men and wrecking 10 vehicles.

Suddenly on 16 December a new phase opened. Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army had broken through in the Ardennes: little doubt that Brussels and Antwerp were his objectives.

For a day or two things were out of hand. The M.G.R.A. 21 Army Group himself came over to Tirlemont. 86 Regiment must be prepared to turn themselves into anti-tank and field gunners.

In the Hesbaye, the fertile, fruit-growing country—reminiscent of Normandy—that stretches eastwards of Brussels towards the Meuse, D Troop of 274 Battery moved into position on 21 December between Jodoigne and Jauche, to take on an anti-tank role until the Guards (who were befogged) could arrive.

That night the Germans were expected on the Meuse. They did not get that far, though two days later their armoured spearhead was reported four miles from Dinant: but infiltrating Germans in American uniform were everywhere, in twos and threes. Greater danger still, from the gunners' point of view, were the patrolling Americans around them; rather trigger-happy (in their own phrase); apt to fire at anything.

For the rest of the Regiment, meanwhile, there was enough excitement to keep them warm even in their frozen gun-pits. From new sites in Holland, as well as along their accustomed easterly and south-easterly lanes, divers were coming in every ten minutes. Many were shot down. One battery shot off their entire stock of ammunition between 1800 hours on 20 December and 0600 hours on the following day.

Simultaneously they faced a sudden resurgence of air activity. More enemy aircraft than the Regiment had seen since the days of the London blitz came over in low-flying raids aimed especially at airfields and petrol dumps.

A Me 109 fired a dump near 273 Battery. Lieut. Stevens, with Gunner Maloney and a few others, set out to try and stop the flames spreading. Working regardless of his own safety, Maloney had his clothes burnt. When the affair was over, he sent in his boots for repair. He was somewhat dismayed to find himself up before his battery commander next morning on a charge of burning his boots. However, the entry he got on his conduct sheet a few days later was a commendation from the Commander-in-Chief.

Sergeant Johnson, who also played a fine part in the evening's work, received a Mention in Dispatches.

Now that the arc around which flying bombs were being loosed was lengthening, 86 Regiment were called back into the Antwerp ring. By 27 December the Ardennes threat was over: Regimental H.Q. moved to Iteghem, 15 miles south-east of Antwerp, with 273 Battery at Berlaer, 274 at Bouwel and 383 at Nijlen. It was a well-timed move, for the enemy's main bomb alley had shifted north-east.

New devices—the "N squared gate"[1] brought along by American technicians, ever ready to help: the new automatic fuze setter and loading device—raised their percentages so high that, as Lieut.-Colonel Champness put it, "If a gun wasn't hitting, you didn't brass off the detachment: you just sent for R.E.M.E. Obviously, it was something gone wrong with the gun".

There was another spell looking after Brussels. R.H.Q. opened up at Tirlemont in a blizzard on 7 January, with the Batteries around St. Gertruiden-Dries. Then back to the Antwerp zone again, for the Germans had found still another launching site, due north this time, in Holland, and so close that every bomb which got through was accurately aimed.

It was the Regiment's most active time. Never had the batteries deployed so close together—a 3000-yard line of guns: B.C.s fighting their own batteries with their own radar, under the general control of R.H.Q. During that spell they reached their highest peak —89 kills out of 91 targets engaged; with an average of 90 rounds per kill.

The excitement was terrific. Temperature was 20 below freezing point, but there was no grumbling, no crime.

One more quiet spell, in early March, during which Lieut.-Colonel Champness, wearing his newly-awarded O.B.E., was able to give his commander, Brigadier-General Armstrong, a demonstration of "trial fire"—the latest drill for improving accuracy.

Then on 10 March the storm broke again. In a last desperate onslaught the Germans were using up their stocks, sending over 100 divers, sometimes, in 24 hours. On 30 March the battle of Antwerp was over.

Had it been more accurate, had it been produced sooner, had it been concentrated on Britain's invasion ports instead of on London, the flying bomb might have exercised a far greater influence on the outcome of the war. Now it was *kaput*.

For 86 Regiment there was a new task ahead.

It lay in waterlogged South Beveland. There, with R.H.Q. at Goes (pronounced Hoose) they kept watch, as coast defence gunners, lest explosive motor-boats should be loosed into the Scheldt mouth; as A.A. again, guarding the channel (but neither boats nor enemy aircraft came the batteries' way); as infantry-cum-gunners, containing, with Royal Marine Commandos, the small pockets of Germans who still remained in North Beveland across the water. There V.E. day found them.

There were months of occupational duties to follow. Lieut.-Colonel P. M. Colebrook took over command from Lieut.-Colonel Champness in September, handing over in turn to Lieut.-Colonel J. G. Tyrrell. The Regiment were in Germany now: their main pursuits, intensive education and the winning (on goal aggregate after a draw in the final) of the B.A.O.R. football championship.

Gazettes in early 1946 notified the appointment as Chevalier of the Order of Leopold II (with palm) and the Belgian Croix de Guerre (with palm) to Lieut.-Colonel Champness and Captain R. E. Stevens; the M.B.E. to Majors E. R. G. Heath and C. Robinson, the Rev. J. C. T. Downes, C.F., and B.S.M. W. R. Newman; the B.E.M. to B.S.M.s J. R. Martin and R. C. Richardson; and many other decorations,[2] including a Belgian Croix de Guerre for Lance-Corporal D. G. Y. Payne—a tribute to the splendid co-operation which R.E.M.E. had given the Regiment throughout the campaign.

On 18 April, 86 (H.A.C.) Regiment's history—for the time being—was over. The Regiment passed into "a state of suspended animation": leaving all ranks to hope that it would not be long before another H.A.C. unit would arise to inherit their laurels.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1] This was a device fitted to the radar which assisted the operator in tracking a V1 when it was surrounded by shell fragments from guns in the forward areas. These, of course, were also picked up by the radar. The weight of metal in the air was often so great that it was very difficult to follow the target on the radar tube. The gate helped to eliminate the interference caused by the shell splinters.

[2] See Appendix II.

BELOW

H.A.C. CADET OFFICERS IN SUMMER CAMP AT GOFFS OAK (HERTS)

FRONT : *Lieut. D. K. Rigby, Lieut. (Q.M.) H. W. Snoad, Major A. W. Hawes, commanding Cadet Battalion, Lieut. C. F. Schooling, Lieut. R. H. Tomkins.*

BACK : *Under Officers P. C. W. Hyne, M. J. Wookey, Roy Allen.*

275 (H.A.C.) HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY, ROYAL ARTILLERY

HAVING gained for the Honourable Artillery Company their first success against the enemy, and shared for more than two years 86 Regiment's nomadic career, 275 Battery left in October 1941 to become part of 118 and later of 165 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. But they always remained 275 (H.A.C.) Battery; reporting their doings still to Armoury House, the martial nursery from which they had sprung.

Regimental Headquarters were already ashore when, on the evening of D + 7 day, the main body of 275 Battery disembarked with their guns, through five feet of surf, on Mike beach at Courseulles. The landing was without incident, though four raiding Focke Wulf 190s caused a good many casualties among a neighbouring R.E. unit as they waited to go ashore.

Major T. B. Tattersfield was in command. Major H. J. Finch, who had commanded the Battery since October 1942, had been appointed Second-in-Command 165 H.A.A. Regiment a month or so prior to their move to the concentration area.

Their first week in Normandy was spent defending B 6, one of the many air strips which, according to the Grand Plan, were to be constructed, immediately after the landing, in the newly won beachhead.

OPPOSITE

H.A.C. Cadet Battalion

UPPER : *General Eisenhower's inspection.*

LOWER : *The Lord Mayor (Sir Frank Newson-Smith—A Battery, 1896) with his guard of honour at the Guildhall.*

It had been the Allies' hope that, in the earliest days of the invasion, it would be possible to seize enemy airfields just back of the coast—particularly that of Carpiquet, on the western edge of Caen. Frustration in this was the price General Montgomery had to pay for his achievement in holding, pinned around that city, the flower of the German Panzer armies. Even so, by the time 275 Battery landed Allied aircraft were already operating, if somewhat hazardously, from the Normandy shore; and within three weeks of D Day 31 Allied squadrons were functioning in the beachhead.

For these, however, there was more than adequate protection. Not even the far-sighted planners of the invasion had surmised how utterly the Allied Air Forces would drive the Luftwaffe from the sky.

Thus, when 275 Battery's help was proffered to the medium gunners for a ground shoot of some importance, it was accepted with alacrity. The possibility had not been unforeseen. Lieut.-Colonel E. Anslow-Wilson, the Regimental Commander, whom all ranks regarded as the creator of this and his other batteries, had ensured, by hard pre-invasion training, that they were fully prepared to function, not only as A.A. but as ground artillery—or even, for that matter, as infantry when later the need arose.[1]

Their target was the enemy strongpoint of Douvres-la Delivrande, still stubbornly held by a German garrison.

It lay two miles back of Luc-sur-Mer, where Juno, 3 Canadian Division's landing place, touched Sword, easternmost of the invasion beaches. Once a famous resort of medieval pilgrims—their statue of the Virgin, lost since the Norman pirates ravaged the coast in pre-Conquest days, had been miraculously discovered by a sheep, which piously drew the shepherd's attention to its sacred find—the twin hamlets had been transformed into a fortress without parallel among the strongpoints of Hitler's Western Wall.

In concrete dugouts many feet below the surface the garrison had defied, alike, aerial and naval bombardment; emerging nightly to harass, with gun, machine-gun and mortar fire, the beach exits. Their well-equipped radar station signalled accurate and timely appreciations of British troop movements and armoured concentrations. Moreover they constituted, with the narrow corridor to their south, a wedge between the two beaches, though beyond the strongpoint the British and Canadian assault divisions were in contact.

It was against Douvres-la Delivrande, therefore, that 275 Battery came into action with their 3.7 guns. They claim to be the first A.A. artillery in France to do a ground shoot; as later, shooting at tank harbours with the aid of an Auster spotting aircraft, they were the first to use the new proximity fuze in a ground role.

> Thence onward their mobility
> Was matched with versatility;
> They shewed their shooting to be sound
> On either target, air or ground.

Thus Sergeant Howes the Battery Clerk who—as gifted at turning a verse as at compiling a return—set down the Battery's adventures, to the delight of all ranks, in a rhyming chronicle.

The strongpoint fell on 17 June. Six days later Higher Command set the Battery a fresh ground task. Linked with a heavy regiment, they supported the pincer attack which the newly landed VIII Corps,[2] in conjunction with 3 Canadian Division, were to launch against the rubble-strewn suburbs of Caen that lay beyond the Orne.

Troops of 15 (Scottish) Division assembled in the Battery area before the assault. Twice, in their first day of battle, the Division attacked in a downpour, unaided from the air since heavy mists grounded the air forces. In a fiercely contested six-day fight, into which the enemy threw—as General Montgomery foresaw they would—all the tank units they could muster, the infantry and armour, advancing a few hundred yards at a time, battered their way round Caen's western flank to the Odon, where they established two bridgeheads.

At Secqueville-en-Bessin—in whose 11th-century church tower Robert Fitz-Harmon, Earl of Gloucester, had taken refuge from the soldiers of Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy, till they smoked him out—275 Battery, embarking on this fresh conquest of Normandy, sited their guns in the edge of a vast cornfield, backed by pastures and woodlands as yet unshattered by war.

In this action they scored their first success in a counter-battery role. By 29 June the weather had lifted. Early in the morning the R.A.F. were due to plaster the area from which a German counter-attack was impending. 275 Battery were set the task of neutralising the enemy's anti-aircraft artillery beforehand; which they did so effectually that only 10 rounds were fired against the bombers.

8 Army Group R.A., under whose command they were operating, sent their special congratulations.

Throughout the night British gunners shelled the woods where the Germans were trying to reform. On one occasion 275 Battery fired 60 rounds per gun in five minutes, followed by 60 rounds per gun three minutes later. It burned the paint off the guns.

Now the Battery, still in a ground role under 8 A.G.R.A., were switched to the east of Caen to support Guards Armoured Division in Operation Goodwood, which has been described elsewhere.[3]

Passing through the ruined villages of St. Contest and Buron, they came into position in the small hollow where once was the hamlet of Mâlon; putting down counter-battery fire on enemy A.A. positions while the Lancasters and Halifaxes went in. In the first two days of the operation they fired 1700 rounds, shooting so fast that everybody "mucked in"—Battery H.Q. and some Canadian R.A.S.C. who happened to be on the spot.

"It is a lovely sight"—this is Captain W. R. Bawden's diary—"to see a 3.7 fire. The barrel whips back in its jacket, the motion too fast to watch the way in which the buffer takes the shock of recoil and, as the gun runs out, slows up the action in the last two inches so that the recuperator does not return the barrel to its original position with too much force. As the breech ring shoots back you see it drawing with it the shiny black cylindrical mass of the barrel, beautifully lubricated with graphite.

"It is a pleasure to watch a good ramming number effortlessly hurl 56 lb. of shell into the chamber, while the breech closes with a metallic Wham! It is all so smooth. In softish ground the gun jumps quite a lot, yet always comes back dead on bearing and Q.E. (quadrant elevation) ready for the next round. A second after the round has gone on its way a slow wreath of ammoniac smoke purls out of the muzzle like smoke after a cigarette smoker's inhalation."

During a lull the Battery's Z group—the 14 men left behind when they sailed—rejoined with sad news. "The old pub at Bromley's gone", they reported. "The doodle-bugs got it." The diarist comments: "The affection the lads have for Beckenham and Bromley and Shortlands is phenomenal."

It was soon after the next move, to a new position at Giberville, south-east of Caen, that 275 Battery suffered a casualty which every officer and man felt deeply. Major H. J. Finch—"Finchy", "the Old Man"—was sitting down (typical of him) to a quiet game of poker. With him round a table in an orchard were the

C.O., Adjutant, M.O., the Padre, the Signals Officer and the Quartermaster. A shell burst in the branches above. Five were wounded, Finch fatally.

For two years he had commanded 275 Battery. They had looked askance when he joined them at Tilshead, Salisbury—a tubby *bon viveur* in a maternity jacket of a greatcoat, with a fund of racy stories and a beaming smile. Within a month or two he had welded his mixed team into an affectionate family. "With him", said one of his officers when the news reached the Battery, "the boyish element of excitement is gone from the war."

The Battery endured at Giberville a more or less continuous rain of 88-mm. shells and suffered a good many casualties—Gunners P. W. S. Selby and W. Hudson killed and 14 wounded. Both troop commanders, Captain W. R. Bawden (C) and Captain R. J. C. Plumptre (D), were slightly wounded but managed to rejoin the Battery on the same day after a spell in hospital of almost record brevity.

Major Tattersfield replaced Finch as Second-in-Command 165 Regiment, Major L. J. Cridland succeeding him as Battery Commander. It was a young battery, in years and in spirit. Cridland, when he took command, was 24; his officers of like age except for Captain Bawden, who became Battery Captain at the almost venerable age of 33.

Goodwood marked the end, for a while, of 275 Battery's independent activities. They now came again under operational control of their parent Regiment, 165 H.A.A., commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Anslow-Wilson. By 10 August they were plunged into General Dempsey's drive through the Bocage country [1] to pin down the Panzer divisions while the Americans, to the west, were smashing through to their final breakout.

By 21 August the last struggle in Normandy was at an end. The Falaise pocket had been drawn tight around 50,000 Germans and the enemy were in flight. A few long-range rounds at Beaulieu marked the end of 275 Battery's fighting in France. They were ordered to fetch their radar equipment from the coast, and were A.A. gunners again, driving, with Guards Armoured Division, towards the Belgian border.

Their first major task was to give A.A. protection to the Seine bridge at Mantes; then on—greeted everywhere by the rapturous acclamation of liberated towns—to defend, as part of Y Force A.A., the Guards' crossing of the Albert Canal. On 8 September a new apparition swam into view, roaring overhead as they guarded Diest airfield. Before officers could reach for their Brens it had dropped a bomb and, unwisely circling, came into range of the neighbouring L.A.A. unit who, by a memorable and (as they would admit) lucky burst of fire, brought it crashing to earth. It was the Battery's first sight of the new German jet-propelled aircraft.

Switching gladly to ground gunnery again, they fired air-burst to prevent the enemy from blowing up a bridge over the Escaut Canal, the only one left standing, which they did so effectively that the Guards were able to pour their armour across, C Troop giving them a good send-off of 400 rounds.

Mid-September found 275 Battery, still in company of the Guards, in the shell-strewn corridor which led north from Eindhoven.

There, on 18 September, the Guards, pressing north, had joined forces with 101 American Airborne Division, moving south from their dropping zones at Veghel. Now, over a bridge which the Sappers had flung across a canal in less than 12 hours, they were driving towards Nijmegen. Their vanguard had already captured the town by a brilliant feat. Five tanks had driven headlong over the 600-yard bridge; two got across. To meet them came U.S. parachute troops of 504 Regiment who, in broad daylight, disregarding their heavy casualties, had ferried themselves over the tumultuous river a mile downstream and fought their way to the bridge's northern end.

With the main body of the Guards a reconnaissance party of 165 Regiment were hurrying to the town, taking with them Captain Plumptre's D Troop with the intention of deploying them lest enemy motor boats, coming up or down the Waal, should try to destroy the bridge.

C Troop, with the other two Batteries of the Regiment, followed close behind. C Troop happened to be at the precise spot when a determined and successful attempt was made by patrols of the First German Parachute Army to break the line of supply.

A sudden attack led by a Tiger tank cut through the column, destroying all but one of the vehicles of a L.A.A. Regimental H.Q. C Troop were halted at the bridge at Veghel, where they hastily put down their guns and opened fire on suspected enemy concentrations.

For four days it was touch and go; with D Troop cut off at Nijmegen while patrols, with the support of U.S. troops, strove to re-establish the corridor.

Following a tank, Sergeant T. W. Rose, with a Bren gun, set out with a hastily assembled troop of gunners. The tank wheeled. Rose continued with his party to the point he was ordered to reach, where they were engaged by a heavily armed enemy patrol. His troop were practically overrun; men of another battery on his right were in worse difficulties. Covering their withdrawal with his fire Rose stayed put, his position swept by machine-gun bullets. Then, with only one Bren magazine left, he withdrew his own men. Gunner A. O. Brown was killed. But for Sergeant Rose's leadership casualties must have been far heavier, and his coolness and determination earned him the Military Medal.

Despite this and other interruptions, the Guards' drive through the narrow corridor, 12 miles in 24 hours against bitter opposition, was a feat so effective that, if other efforts had matched it, the gallantry of the British airborne troops at Arnhem might have bought, with their 1130 dead and 3000 wounded, a greater degree of success. But there were factors no planner could reckon with: the quite fortuitous presence, in the very target area, of two vigorous Panzer divisions, ordered there with no inkling of the coming attack; and a thick unseasonable fog over England, delaying the vital airborne reinforcements.

It was in these circumstances that, with the arrival of C Troop in Nijmegen, D Troop were deployed in two sections: one, under Lieut. Williams, virtually in No Man's Land on the far north of Nijmegen bridge; the other, under Lieut. Hugo O'Neill, beside the bridge, directly in the line of fire from enemy guns.

For two days O'Neill's section endured heavy and continuous shell fire. Five other ranks were killed—including Battery Sergeant Major J. W. T. Grimshaw—and two wounded. Lieut. O'Neill's imperturbability throughout this action was largely responsible for earning him the Military Cross.

Thwarted in the effort of "Market Garden", Field-Marshal Montgomery turned to the vast project which, he believed, would end the war before the winter set in: the concentration of the Allied forces in one gigantic assault to turn, by a right hook to the Ruhr, the end of Germany's western wall.

The complex causes which frustrated this master plan have been discussed elsewhere.[5] For Second Army its rejection meant a winter of slogging fighting in the waterlogged wastes of western Holland. For 275 Battery, virtually converted to ground gunnery, it meant supporting fire for one attack after another as the Army fought their way through the wettest and coldest of winters across the Maas and on to the Rhine.

There was little time for social interchange; but now and again the Battery were within hailing distance of 13 (H.A.C.) Regiment, engaged on the same task: as when, from 2 to 5 October, they fought with 3 Division in the taking of Overloon and the retaking of Venraij, and with 15 (Scottish) Division in their counter-attack at Deurne.

They had their part, too, in the barrier which Field-Marshal Montgomery rushed down to bar the line of the Meuse against the Germans' Christmas thrust from the Ardennes. Again they had their comrades of 13 Regiment near at hand as they came into action to protect Louvain. Rushed south to Dinant, they awaited a German onslaught on the bridges; but though the enemy's advanced armour was reported only four miles away, the Panzer thrust had spent itself and the Battery were not called on to open fire.

On 8 February 1945 the Battery reached the climax of their service. Among the quagmires of the Reichswald, as First Canadian Army thrust downwards from the Belgian border in Operation Veritable to clear the country between the Maas and the Rhine, their 3.7s fired incessantly for 22 days, loosing off 16,349 rounds; and theirs were among the 3300 guns whose barrage, spread along a front of 25 miles, helped Second Army across the Rhine.

Once over the river they became A.A. gunners again; for as Second Army pierced deep into Germany the Luftwaffe, in their final effort to stem the flood of disaster, brought their old dive-bombing tactics into use once more, giving 275 Battery many snap targets before, defending the Elbe bridges which 13 Regiment had crossed four days earlier, they fired, at 0455 hours on 4 May, their last rounds in war.

NOTES

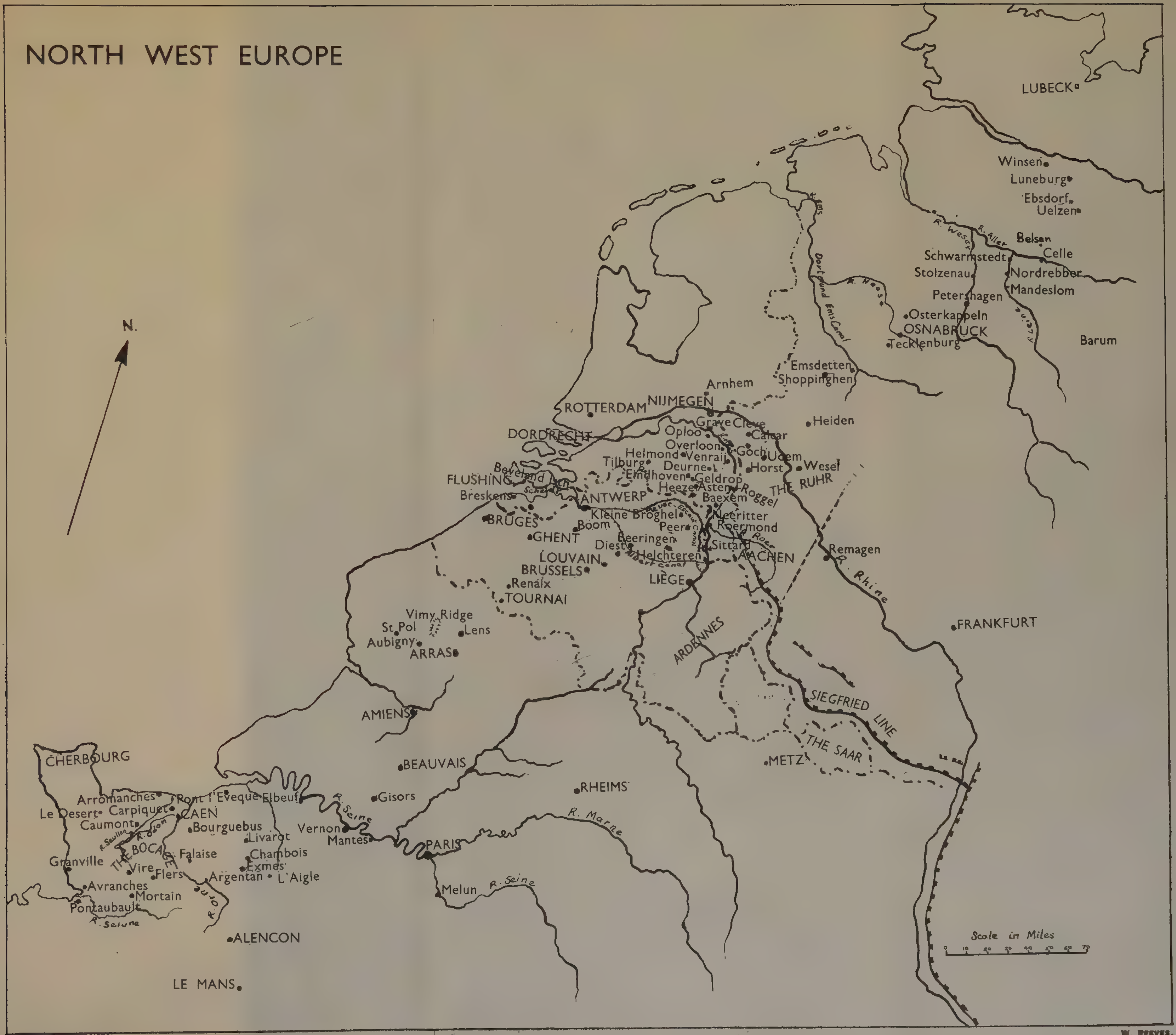
[1] Lieut.-Colonel Anslow-Wilson was awarded the D.S.O. for his services.

[2] Commanded by Lieut.-General Sir Richard O'Connor (1 Coy, 1917).

[3] See page 259.

[4] See page 266.

[5] See page 278.



NORTH WEST EUROPE

N.
LUBECK
Winsen
Luneburg
Ebsdorf
Uelzen
R. Weser
R. Aller
Belsen
Celle
Schwarmstedt
Stolzenau
Nordrebber
Mandeslom
Petershagen
R. Leine
Osterkappeln
OSNABRUCK
Tecklenburg
Barum
R. Ems
Dortmund Ems Canal
R. Weser
Emsdetten
Shoppinghen
Arnhem
NIJMEGEN
ROTTERDAM
Heiden
DORDRECHT
Grave
Cleve
Oploo
Calcar
Overloon
Goch
Helmond
Venraij
Udem
Tilburg
Deurne
Horst
Wesel
Beveland
Isth
FLUSHING
Eindhoven
Geldrop
Scheldt
Heeze
Asten
Roggel
THE RUHR
Breskens
ANTWERP
Baexem
Meuse-Escaut Canal
Kleine Broghel
Neeritter
BRUGES
Boom
Peer
Roermond
GHENT
Beeringen
Canal
R. Roer
Diest
Sittard
Remagen
LOUVAIN
Helchteren
AACHEN
Albert Canal
BRUSSELS
LIÈGE
R. Rhine
Renaix
TOURNAI
Vimy Ridge
St. Pol
Lens
Aubigny
ARRAS
ARDENNES
FRANKFURT
SIEGFRIED LINE
AMIENS
CHERBOURG
THE SAAR
METZ
BEAUVAIS
RHEIMS
Arromanches
Pont l'Eveque
Elbeuf
R. Seine
Gisors
Le Desert
Carpiquet
CAEN
R. Marne
Caumont
R. Seulles
R. Odon
Bourguebus
Vernon
Livarot
Mantes
PARIS
THE BOCAGE
Falaise
Chambois
Granville
Vire
Exmes
Flers
Argentan
L'Aigle
Avranches
Mortain
R. Orne
Melun
R. Seine
Pontaubault
R. Selune
ALENCON
LE MANS
Scale in Miles
0
10
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70

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446 (H.A.C.) HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY, ROYAL ARTILLERY

ALTHOUGH they were for less than a year a component of 86 (H.A.C.) H.A.A. Regiment, 446 Battery were, from their inception, an H.A.C. unit. Their commander, when they were incorporated in 86 Regiment in September 1941, was Major A. Mills (A Battery, 1922). Under his successor Major J. B. Ransome—from 275 (H.A.C.) Battery—they were "budded off", becoming a constituent of 164 H.A.A. Regiment.

There followed a spell as a Holding and Training Battery, performing a dual function which kept their officers at work all round the clock. In action at Slades Green, Beckenham, the Isle of Dogs, Woolwich and elsewhere, they manned their guns against air attack, at the same time training successive batches of gun and instrument numbers who, as fast as they passed out, departed for newly-formed units. Key personnel only remained—a captain, two subalterns, four sergeants, eight bombardiers.

Thus they carried on until, in 1943, 164 Regiment gathered them into the fold again and carried them off to the Orkneys to serve in a new role, the air protection of the Fleet in Scapa Flow.

As D Day approached it became evident that the enemy had scant resources to spare for air attack in that quarter. Once again it fell to 446 Battery to part with their A1 men, drafting them to A.A. units of the invading force.

By the time they had spent 18 months in the Orkneys it was considered that the need for A.A. defence in that area was passed. 164 Regiment became non-operative, transferring most of their personnel to units on the south-eastern coast to help combat the flying bomb attacks; and in the spring of 1944 Major R. Fogg, 446 Battery's last commander, completed, in a camp near Glasgow, the final disbandment of the unit.

H.A.C. INFANTRY—162 (H.A.C.) O.C.T.U.

CORNELIA, mother of the Gracchi, scorning even to share the throne of the King of Egypt, devoted her life to the training of her children. When asked to shew her jewels, she presented her sons.

Following, albeit unwillingly, this illustrious example, the Infantry Battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company devoted their war service to the training of officers. Asked to shew their battle honours, they can point with pride to the names of some 4000 officers who learned soldiering at their hands and served in virtually every branch of the Armed Forces. Five reached the rank of Brigadier.[1] They included more than 150 Lieut.-Colonels and nearly 700 Majors. Nearly 300 fell in the field of battle. Among their decorations for gallantry[2] they numbered one Victoria Cross, one George Cross, 22 D.S.O.s and 169 Military Crosses.

It has to be said, "albeit unwillingly". Thanks, largely, to the foresight and stubborn insistence of Lieut.-Colonel Goldsworthy and Captain Richard Goodbody, his Adjutant, the Batteries were able to overcome the reluctance of the War Office and, while budding off an officer-producing organisation, to retain their identity as fighting units.

The Battalion, mindful of their 1914-18 war record, spared no appeal and no remonstrance even in the highest quarters to be allowed to earn, in this war, laurels such as their forbears had won. The authorities, equally mindful of the number of potential leaders who died in the ranks in the first year of the old war, were adamant.

All the Battalion could do, therefore, was to see—as they proceeded to do—that, schooled in their companies, the largest possible number of well-trained officers should be sent into the Service; contenting themselves with the vicarious honours thereafter to be won by their sons.

Accordingly that veteran Major R. C. Cole, Chairman of the Court of Assistants, was called from his Special Constabulary duties on 5 September 1939 with the summons "If you want to see the Battalion marching out of Armoury House for the last time . . ." and, with many other veterans, said good-bye to his old unit as they moved to Gordon Barracks, Bulford, under the command of Lieut.-Colonel W. B. Farrar (3 Company) to become 162 (H.A.C.) Officer Cadet Training Unit.

Not all the Battalion's officers went to Bulford. A few were posted to 165 O.C.T.U. at Dunbar—including Major A. D. McKechnie who, parting with the Company with whom he had served for 14 years, little knew in what rank, and in what theatre of war, he would again encounter the H.A.C.

Once established in their new location the cadets put all other preoccupations aside to concentrate, for 24 hours a day, on training for commissioned service. The hundred and one chores which make inroads on the soldier's time were undertaken by a duty company of D.C.L.I. reservists, whose cheerful and comradely co-operation contributed—more, perhaps, than they knew—to the work in hand.

To reinforce their own N.C.O.s the O.C.T.U. absorbed a number of instructors from the Regular Army and the Reserve; but as regards these last the tables were turned. Some of them had left the Army for quite a while. Modern equipment such as the Bren gun was new to them. Till they themselves were posted as officers to other units, many of the cadets—whose school days were not, perhaps, so far distant that Latin tags were forgotten—could quote with glee "*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*" as they found themselves instructing their instructors; a temporary reversal of role which was accepted, by both sides, with abundant good humour.

Company commanders were the first to depart. To the regular officers posted to relieve them were added specialists in Army education, including officers of school O.T.C.s. For at least the first year, however, many of the platoon commanders were retained: among them Lieuts. D. ("Monkey") Neill, John Tolmie, J. E. Anderson, N. Halfhead, Drummond Drysdale, Norman Johns and Rex Marchand, as well as Donald Spence, the M.T.O.; their tasks including lectures—seven a day, sometimes—on subjects as diverse as military law, tactics, unit administration, weapon training, vehicle maintenance, map reading and gas.

For some time, too, the O.C.T.U. were able to retain their peacetime Adjutant, Captain Sir Terence Falkiner, Coldstream Guards, together with the Training Officer, Captain C. M. F. Deakin, and the R.S.M., "Snapper" Robinson, both Grenadier Guards.

In such hands—with the Sergeants' Mess running on traditional H.A.C. lines; with the Band lending their customary exhilaration to the proceedings—the new unit passed through their metamorphosis, fulfilling, and more than fulfilling, the demands of Higher Authority, while preserving their special H.A.C. characteristics.

Only in one respect, perhaps, did they deviate from the O.C.T.U. normal, as long as H.A.C. members remained in the ranks. The old tradition of mixing in free conviviality when off parade was modified—in barracks. But in various country inns, some of them a good many miles' walk from Bulford, there still were to be found gatherings of all ranks, carrying on the jovial fellowship of the Sutling Room.

Though their primary objective was the training of officers, the unit remained at all times conscious of another role—the repelling of an ever-possible German invasion. On many occasions, as a field service battalion, they stood to arms, taking up the defence positions assigned to them whenever the code word "Cromwell" should be passed.

By October 1939 more than 500 of the original members had proceeded to commissions, and intake from outside the H.A.C. began. The old jealously-guarded identity of the companies was abandoned so that cadets might be grouped according to their degree of training. A machine-gun wing was formed. Lieut.-Colonel C. J. M. Riley, Coldstream Guards, took over command, succeeded a year later by Lieut.-Colonel P. J. M. Ellison, Grenadier Guards, who had become a member of the H.A.C. at the outbreak of war. A reconnaissance wing and a motor wing were added.

On 3 April 1941 this section of the Company's activities was inspected—as, in turn, all H.A.C. units were—by the Captain General. The visit of H.M. the King was followed by many changes: the budding-off of the motor wing to come under the aegis of the Royal Armoured Corps; the move to Winston Barracks, Lanark; the absorption of 170 O.C.T.U. By the end of 1941 the composition of the Unit had been changed to three reconnaissance squadrons and a machine-gun company, eventually transferred to its own O.C.T.U.

None of the original 162 O.C.T.U. were left when, in November 1942, the unit ceased to exist, the remaining reconnaissance squadrons—one still bearing for a time the title "H.A.C."—being absorbed in the R.A.C. O.C.T.U., Sandhurst.

By that time 2981 cadets had been sent to Infantry, Reconnaissance Corps, M.G. and other units and branches.

For the rest of the war the H.A.C. Battalion and O.C.T.U. remained merely a memory; but a living memory. As innumerable "letters home" to the JOURNAL testified, there was no theatre of war, there was indeed hardly a unit, which did not see from time to time a reminiscent reunion of officers whose military training had begun under the Honourable Artillery Company's flag.[3]

NOTES

[1] Those General Officers who, earlier in their careers, had seen service in the H.A.C.—including General Sir R. O'Connor, Lieut.-General Lumsden, Lieut.-General Sir Richard Goodbody, Major-General J. C. Campbell, V.C., Major-General H. C. Phipps and Major-General Roger Evans—are not reckoned here because, although the Regiment claimed them as members, they were not among the officers trained by the H.A.C. in the course of this war.

[2] See Appendix II. The figures given, however, do not tally with those to be found in the Appendix, which contains only the names of officers who were actually members of the Regiment.

[3] Two flags of the Unit—the House Flag with "162 O.C.T.U." superimposed—are preserved at Armoury House.

H.A.C. NATIONAL DEFENCE COMPANIES

13 (HOME DEFENCE) BATTALION

THE ROYAL FUSILIERS

THE London Docks were not an operational area, and 13 (Home Defence) Battalion, the Royal Fusiliers, in which the H.A.C. National Defence Companies had been merged, were not an operational unit.

This thought was no doubt a great solace to Lieut.-Colonel J. Bamford Smith and Captain S. Scott, his Adjutant, as at 0200 hours on 25 August 1940, they broke off from their task of helping to deal with the fires which surrounded their Battalion H.Q. in the West India Docks. A two-hour attack with incendiary bombs had set warehouses in all directions uproariously alight and, water pressure having fallen to nil, there was nothing much for the moment which 13 Royal Fusiliers could do.

As, in search of refreshment, the officers mounted to their mess room on the first floor of a century-old storehouse, they noticed, without remarking it particularly, a smell of smoke. They opened the door to find a bonfire in the middle of the mess carpet, where one more incendiary had lodged and was spouting flames four feet high. At 0415 hours—the windows having in the meantime been blown in and the adjoining shed, full of tarred rope, having gone up in flames—they got their refreshment.

The opening of Hitler's blitz on Central London and Dockland coincided almost exactly with a notable anniversary. On 23 August 1939 the National Defence Companies of the H.A.C. had been embodied and had set about their wartime tasks. On 23 August 1940, 17 officers and 123 men had supped together at Armoury House to commemorate their first year of service; sending, of course, a loyal telegram to their Captain General, to which His Majesty had telegraphed a cordial reply.

Next afternoon, reconnoitring wharves in the Isle of Dogs, the C.O. had heard the now familiar syren, followed by gunfire, and what sounded like the thuds of bombs. In an hour the alarm had blown over. It broke out again just before midnight—the bomb explosions unannounced, this time, by syrens—and in quite a short while H.Q. was ringed with flames.

Thenceforward, with hardly a day's intermission, the bombing of Dockland proceeded spasmodically, by night and day, until on the afternoon of 7 September it suddenly took on a new intensity in the Battle of London.

The new stage announced itself dramatically. As Lieut.-Colonel Bamford Smith arrived in his car alongside King Edward VII Memorial Park, Shadwell, he found his way blocked by a flaming crater where a bomb had severed a gas main.

"This may be history, and very interesting," he remarked to his driver, Corporal Goodwin, with a glance at fresh squadrons of German planes approaching from the West, "but I think we might take a bit of cover from this next lot." As they descended to the basement of a shattered shop they were hastened on their way by the corrugated iron backyard fence, blown at that moment half through the back door.

From that point onward the Germans (now sweeping up the Thames estuary from the sea) let no night pass without an onslaught on the Docks area. It was, of course, an experience shared by millions of Londoners during the 62 days of concentrated attack on the Capital. The "non-operational" duties which the H.A.C. Defence Companies were performing in Dockland and elsewhere ensured them an adequate quota.

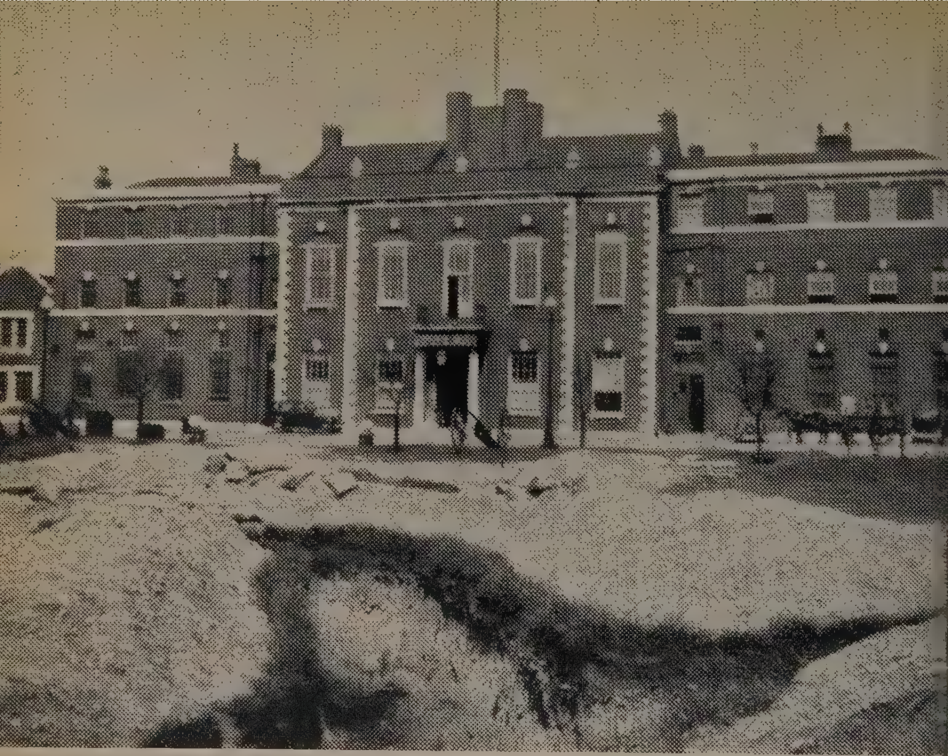
BELOW

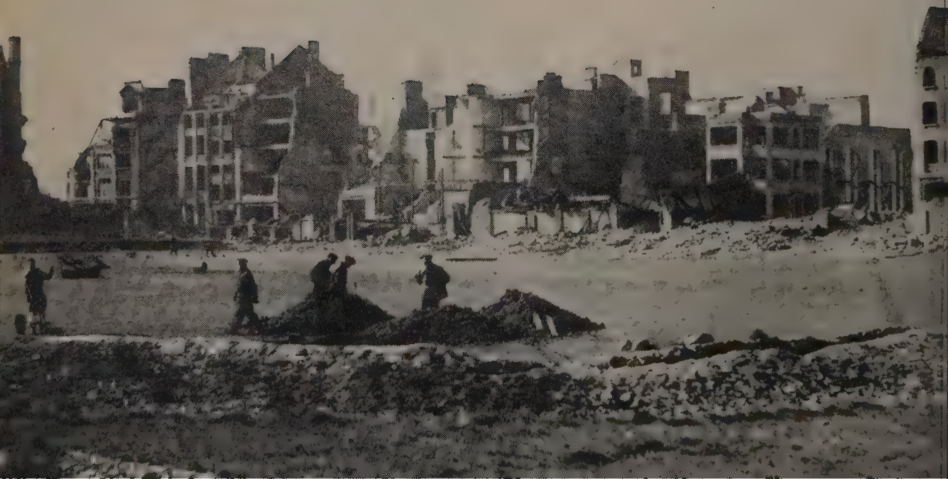
H.A.C. DIVISION, METROPOLITAN SPECIAL CONSTABULARY, *September 1940*

BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: *S/Constables L. Poynder, H. C. Rowe, R. S. Longcroft, W. Potter Mackenrot, A. Bates, M.M., F. E. Riches.*

MIDDLE ROW: *S/Constables H. C. Lavington, F. W. Y. Robinson, E. J. Spanier, A. H. Clark, I. K. Fraser, T. F. Griggs, C. Savory, L. H. Eberli, E. W. D. Perry, F. H. Barnes, T. R. Brown.*

FRONT ROW: *Sergt. R. J. Drury, S/C. H. I. G. Pothecary, Sergt. A. J. Nathan, Inspector E. F. Stanford, Commander F. Y. Bright, Commandant R. C. Cole, M.B.E., T.D., Inspector W. A. Stone, M.C., T.D., Inspector A. Baldwin, Sergt. W. B. Jarvis, S/C.s W. D. Ramsey, E. J. Butler.*





Raised several years before the war, under the command of Major J. Bamford Smith (late B Battery), the H.A.C. National Defence Companies had formed part of 21 (City of London) Group N.D.C. They were embodied on 23 August 1939 and in November —still under the same C.O.—became a constituent of 13 (Home Defence) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers. Of this Battalion the H.A.C. provided two companies—A, commanded by Captain J. D. Canning (4 Company 1906; afterwards Second-in-Command of the Battalion); B, commanded by Captain Joseph Hill (B Battery, 1914). Linked with these were two companies of 5 Royal Berkshire Regiment and one each from 8 and 9 Royal Fusiliers.

Beginning with a strength of just under 300, the Battalion had expanded by June 1940 into a command over 1300 strong with more than 50 officers, and later reached higher figures still. This leaves out of account the accession of strength which came when two Local Defence Volunteer units (quickly renamed Home Guard) were brought for a while (June–August 1940) under the aegis of 13 Royal Fusiliers for operations and training. Both these units were commanded by H.A.C. officers—Major R. Hargreaves and Colonel Sir Lambert Ward.

On 29 June 1940 13 Royal Fusiliers formally shouldered the duty of Docks Garrison—most vital of their varied responsibilities. These also included guarding the Bank of England and Finsbury Barracks. Fairlop Airfield, the Royal Gun Powder Factory at Waltham Abbey, the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield, a munitions factory at Rainham, the Beckton Gas Works and many other installations and vulnerable points came under their protection. It took the C.O. a 102-mile journey to get round his posts by car. But the Battalion's chief and most onerous function was as Docks Garrison.

East and West India Docks, the Royal Group and the Surrey Commercial Docks at Rotherhithe were under their care, with all the wharves north of the Thames from Tower Bridge to Gallions Reach. Not to guard against air perils only. When they took charge, the duration and savagery of Hitler's blitz on London were as yet only half envisaged. It was their task also to defend the Docks against land attack should the Invasion of England, by all omens

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OPPOSITE

H.Q. IN WARTIME

UPPER: *P.A.D. trenches in front of Armoury House.*

LOWER: *The Artillery Garden after the blitz.*

imminent, include—as it surely must—a sea-borne thrust into the Port of London.

Here among the warehouses stored with Britain's provisions the C.O. and the officers and men of his largest sub-units lived throughout the blitz's crucial days; and here quite a few of them died.

They were ex-soldiers, all of them: mostly between 45—the minimum recruiting age except for a few whose medical category was below "active service" standards—and 60. Their ranks, in former service, had ranged from Rifleman to Lieut.-Colonel.

If a damning indictment were needed of the successive Governments whose feeble hands had held our destinies in the between-war years, it lies in the fact that the country which in 1918 had possessed arms for more than 1,000,000 men could provide, at the commencement of their service, only one rifle per three men.

Their C.O. was, however, an officer not without resource, and not too strictly wedded to the "usual channels"; and he had a small arms factory within his parish. Before long, scouring Territorial drill halls, he had collected 150 drill pattern long Lee Enfields of 1900 vintage and persuaded their mother factory to fit them with firing pins; eight Lewis guns had been "won" and even one Bren.

At least his men had, for the time being, something to fire with, and when low-flying attacks became prevalent, two N.D.C. machine-guns, on mounts improvised by a friendly firm in the Docks, were able to add their quota to the defences. (Till the mounts were ready, the C.O. and his Adjutant or anyone who was handy took turns to fire a Lewis gun, each resting the barrel on the other's shoulder.)

Even so, some considerable time was to elapse during which many men of the National Defence Companies would have nothing more potent with which to resist the invader than entrenching tool helves.

It was not only in Government circles that this apathy prevailed. In the spring of 1940 Lieut.-Colonel Bamford Smith, learning that eight warehouses within 200 yards of his H.Q. each contained 3000 tons of sugar, had ventured to warn those concerned that it might be good sense to empty the top floors, covering them with six inches of sand or brickwork. However, the authorities could not be bothered.

If in these circumstances there is any satisfaction in "I told you so", Bamford Smith had it in full measure during the great London blitz of September 1940 when, unable to do anything to save them, he watched each warehouse in turn go up in flames.

Tucked away among their wharves and gantries, the N.D.C. had a gratifying reminder that their services were by no means forgotten when, on 23 July 1940, the C.O., receiving warning of an imminent visit by a V.V.I.P., divined that his Garrison were about to be inspected by the Captain General.

Driving round with the C.O., H.M. the King had many questions to ask and much to see: as when he halted for a considerable time before a pile of bricks and rubble and smashed treasures outside the Royal Victoria Docks, all that remained of 30 homes hit by a H.E. bomb in one of the sporadic raids a few days before.

His Majesty spent two hours with the Garrison, inspecting, at the Coopers Company Schools, Bow, the well-turned-out Young Soldiers Company which had come under the Battalion's wing,[1] and finally taking tea in the Officers' Mess.

Later, on 2 October, when the blitz was in full swing, another royal visitor, H.R.H. the Duke of Kent, came to see "all round". He meant "all round", too. He was half-way between the eastern end of King George V Dock and the Gallions gate when a squadron of German bombers came over. There was no cover anywhere near. The Duke walked on to the gate as nonchalantly as if he had been on a peace-time stroll through the Park, while crashes and clouds of smoke told that the enemy's objective this time was the dock basin 100 yards or so to the west.

His Royal Highness drove his own car from the gate, back to the mess in the West India Docks, and had tea with the officers.

Snatches from the C.O.'s diary give some colourful pictures of these exciting days.

There was the moment in September when, at 0300 hours with plenty falling, the C.O. returned to his cellar dugout, after a round, to find a Chinese girl asleep on his bed. A ship lying alongside Canary Quay had just been hit; several of the crew killed; some of the Chinese survivors were crouching on the stairs. Comment on this unusual situation was curtailed by the fact that at that moment a bomb fell on the Headquarters building opposite, setting alight piles of returns whose loss the C.O. bore with some stoicism.

There was the Rum Quay "incident" too, on 8 September, the second day of the "all-out" blitz—worthy of mention from the fact that it proved London's biggest war-time blaze.[2] Towards the south-eastern corner of the West India Import Dock, an immense warehouse, more than 1000 feet long and 100 feet wide, was in flames from end to end. Nothing could be done to extinguish this fire; the heat made any near approach impossible. Blazing rum poured over the quayside into the water, setting fire to barges. S.S. *Ben Nevis*, on which seven men had been killed on the previous night, broke her quay moorings and drifted across with her stern towards the blazing quay. Flames rose from a roar to a scream, punctuated with a succession of explosions; and there was nothing anybody could do.

There were quite enough bombs falling in 13 Royal Fusiliers area—UXBs (unexploded bombs) which were time bombs, those which were "duds" and more which were imaginary ones, product of the impact of "dud" or fragmented A.A. shell on particularly resonant surfaces—to justify the attachment to the Battalion of their own Bomb Disposal Officer. On 16 September 1940 the C.O. had the pleasure of congratulating that officer, Lieut. R. Davies, Royal Engineers, on a historic combination of initiative, technical knowledge and gallantry when he dug out a delayed-action bomb from the very near neighbourhood of St. Paul's Cathedral. The bomb weighed a ton, was down 27½ feet, and had broken and fired a gas main in its descent. Lieut. Davies and his men dug out the bomb and hauled it on a lorry, which Davies himself drove to Hackney Marshes, where he exploded it.

Seven days later King George VI, broadcasting from Buckingham Palace, itself bearing the honourable scars of several express attacks, announced the creation of "a new mark of honour", the George Cross, to rank next to the Victoria Cross. Lieut. R. Davies was one of the earliest recipients.

The C.O. and his officers had many front-row views of the blitz; none more memorable, perhaps, than those from the 40 h.p. launch which the C.O. used to get through to the eastern end of the Royal group of docks when—as was often the case—the roads were blocked with debris.

As the launch passed one afternoon, an oil bomb set a warehouse ablaze. Opposite, two others disintegrated, hit by H.E. At that moment the launch's engine failed.

There were no sweeps, and there was a five-knot tide, with the overhanging bows of four lines of barges just ahead, collision with which would have taken the launch under for a certainty.

But earlier in the war a Guards officer had given Lieut.-Colonel Bamford Smith a useful warning: never go about without a whistle on your Sam Browne. Three of the loudest blasts he could blow, and a Port of London steam launch cut across, nicking the unmanageable craft from just under the barges' noses.

In December 1940, Battalion H.Q. were ordered, for a rest, to Totteridge, though they remained responsible for their scattered, vital duties. By March 1941 H.Q. were back in their old spot in the West India Docks. In December 1941, 13 (H.D.) Battalion were converted to 30 Battalion Royal Fusiliers—no longer a Home Defence but a General Service unit. On 30 June 1942 Lieut.-Colonel Bamford Smith relinquished command of this unit and—feeling it was time to seek some real excitement—took to gliding with the R.A.F. By that time the ties which bound the Battalion to Armoury House were loosening, as more and more of the H.A.C. members—in age above, or in medical category below, General Service requirements—betook themselves to other wartime pursuits.

NOTES

[1] The Company Commander, Captain Frank Green, was killed shortly afterwards.

[2] The official classification was: *Conflagration*—major fire which is spreading; *major fire*—requiring 30 pumps or over; *serious*—11-30 pumps; *medium*—2-10 pumps; *small*—one pump. Rum Quay was a conflagration.

H.A.C. DIVISION

METROPOLITAN SPECIAL CONSTABULARY

ON 4 March 1941 there was a gathering in the Court Room, the central figure of which was Major R. C. Cole, M.B.E., T.D.—not, however, in the capacity of Chairman of the Court of Assistants, over whose activities he had presided, and was to preside, throughout the war years. This time he was in the Court Room to hand over, in the place where he had undertaken them nearly 22 years earlier, the duties of Commandant of the H.A.C. Division, Metropolitan Special Constabulary, the one H.A.C. unit who, from beginning to end of their war service, were recruited solely from members of the Company.

The speeches on this occasion said nearly all that needs to be said about the activities of the H.A.C. Division; for though their members continued, throughout hostilities and for a considerable time afterwards, to carry out their unspectacular but essential duties, they did so in the spirit which Major Cole had implanted during 20 years of peace and a year and a half of war.

The H.A.C. Division, Metropolitan Special Constabulary had come into existence on 31 July 1919. The beloved Colonel Commandant, H.A.C., Lord Denbigh—to the forefront in this as in all the Company's activities—had been the first Commandant of the Division; but his health at that time did not permit active participation in their functions, and Major Cole, who succeeded him, had been from the beginning in effective control.

The 40 members who paraded for duty at Commercial Street Police Station on the proclamation of a State of Emergency on 1 September 1939 represented only a small proportion of the peace-time strength, which had in some years risen to nearly 10 times that figure.

Many of the members, however, though available for peace-time service—which indeed they had rendered on numerous occasions, varying from the General Strike to royal progresses—had in war-time prior military commitments. True to the first part of their Vellum Book pledge—to be constant in attending to their military duties—they had departed to other spheres.

There remained the second part of that pledge—to assist the Civil Power in maintaining tranquillity; and this undertaking the remaining members set themselves to fulfil. As Sir Walter Allen, Commandant-in-Chief, was at pains to point out, there were, for men not immediately required for military duty, few fields of patriotic service more vital and more worth while than that of the Special Constabulary.

Two choices lay before the Specials. They could serve as whole-time paid constables working the normal (and in strenuous times nominal) eight hours a day. One member, Sergeant W. B. Jarvis, was able to undertake this kind of service. Figuring on the duty roll of the regular Police, he was able to maintain a most useful liaison between that Force and the H.A.C. volunteers who shared their nightly vigils.

The bulk of the members, having responsibilities in other spheres, and travelling, many of them, from distant homes, rendered unpaid part-time service. The majority reported for duty at 6 p.m., carrying out nightly patrols in Stepney and Bethnal Green which would otherwise have been the responsibility of the regular Police, themselves stretched to the utmost by the recall of many of their members to the Colours.

In the early weeks of war, however, they were able to relieve the Regulars in a variety of duties other than patrolling. One of the first of these was to marshal and escort to the railway terminus thousands of children bound for evacuation areas. To other H.A.C. Specials fell the task of dealing with the throngs of aliens now hurriedly seeking registration in one of the largest of London's centres: a function the performance of which brought many testimonies to the Division's efficiency.

The street patrols, however, were the salient feature of the Division's operations. The prospect of doing their war service among the back streets and warehouses of the East End may, at the beginning, have aroused misgivings. Long before the war was over, the H.A.C. Specials had woven themselves into the life of their district, and would have scorned any offer to change their beats in Shoreditch and Bethnal Green for the most fashionable and wealthy neighbourhood.

Witness Inspector A. Baldwin (2 Battalion, 1915). One of the original Specials, he had put in much valuable work at Commercial Street on records and duty planning when domestic reasons compelled his transfer to his home area of Northwood; a "beat" which, without disrespect to those who served there, may be described as fairly "cushy". The moment his affairs permitted, he was back again in the East End, where he stayed till the last V1 and V2 were just unpleasant memories.

Nightly duty throughout the blitz established a comradeship with fellow-members, with the Regulars whose patrols they shared and with the stoical Londoners among whom they moved, which remained among the cherished traditions to be handed on to their peace-time successors.

Their district was second to none in the devastation it suffered during the months of air raids; but the H.A.C. Division, astonishingly enough, sustained no casualties, though their station was damaged and the Commandant's office completely destroyed; this despite the fact that men on patrol, normally due for relief at 10 p.m., were often retained on duty until the "All Clear" sounded, perhaps as late as 6.30 on the following morning.

It was a service in which prospect of promotion played no part. While, on the military side of the Honourable Artillery Company, members were rising as high as General, the Special Constabulary were aware that, except for the small nucleus of senior ranks, the post of constable on street patrol was the one in which their most valuable service could be rendered; and constables they were content to remain.

What their voluntary part-time service involved may be gauged from the attendance records. During the three months ended 30 June 1940, for example, out of a total available strength of 31 officers and other ranks, the average weekly attendance was 25 and more than 4400 hours of active police duty were performed.

The outstanding record of service was that achieved by Special Constable H. I. G. Pothecary (No. 1 Company). A Special Constable before he joined the H.A.C. in 1916, he served with the Battalion during the 1914–18 war; transferred to the H.A.C. Special Constabulary on their formation, and by 27 June 1942 had contributed

1000 hours of police service without missing a single day's duty—a total vastly exceeded before the war was over. His service was recognised by the award of the British Empire Medal, and by suitable versification in the JOURNAL.[1]

In December 1940 Major Cole was appointed Commandant of G Division, with its five stations, while retaining his post as Commandant of the H.A.C. Division. Captain F. Y. Bright (formerly B Battery) was promoted Commander. He had shared with Colonel W. A. Stone, M.C., T.D., watch and watch about—the former as Assistant Commander, the latter as Inspector—the day-to-day running of the Division, of which both were original members.

In November 1940, when Major Cole was obliged on medical grounds to retire, he was succeeded by Commander Bright, who as Commandant directed the activities of the H.A.C. Division for the remainder of their service.

NOTE

[1] Not content with truncheon and rifle, Pothecary adapted himself to handling still another weapon when, after the Armistice, he became a Pikeman.

H.A.C. CADET BATTALION

IN March 1942 the Court of Assistants met to consider a situation the like of which had perhaps not arisen since the Plague of 1665. No gentlemen were "exercising armes upon the Artillery Grounds". The Infantry, traditional framework around which the bulk of the Company's history had been built, had long since taken post as officers in every arm of the Service. The gunners were dispersed—in the Desert, in East Anglia, in Yorkshire, around London's outer borders. The National Defence Companies were at their Dockland stations; the Specials on their East End beats; but in the Artillery Garden itself there no longer flourished a Nursery of Arms.

The outcome of the Court's deliberations—in consultation with the War Office and the City of London Cadet Association—was the formation of the Cadet Battalion, Honourable Artillery Company: a move which the Colonel Commandant "welcomed with particular pleasure, not only because of the further opportunity it offers to the Company of performing a national service in this time of emergency, but more particularly because it will serve in some measure to keep alive the very old, indeed original, Infantry traditions of the Regiment".

The "youngest branch of the oldest Regiment of the British Army" received their first formal recognition at a meeting in the Egyptian Hall of the Mansion House. The Lord Mayor, Sir John Laurie, presided, supported by the Alderman who was next year to succeed him, Sir Frank Newson-Smith (A Battery, 1896); by officers representing London District, the City Territorial Army Association, the Home Guard and by the heads of London business houses.

There the Number One recruit, J. Streatfield, signed the Cadets' own Vellum Book, the gift of Lieut. (Quartermaster) Harold Snoad; the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs and other distinguished guests adding their names.

Under the officer appointed by the Court to command the unit, Major A. W. Hawes, M.C. (1 Company, 1914), the Cadets soon attracted a steady stream of recruits—boys between the ages of 15 and 18. They were joined later by a welcome reinforcement when the cadet units of Mercers' and Owen's Schools became part of the Battalion.

Needless to say, no arms were available to begin with. Even half-way through the war the nation had not yet fully replaced the armaments sold for scrap in the feckless years. But urgent and not wholly orthodox measures secured at least a quota of weapons. Their antiquity rendered them objects of historic rather than military interest, but they served at least for the time being to alleviate, with some small-arms drill, the "square-bashing" which even the keenest cadets were beginning to find monotonous.

Though the cadets were not admitted, at this stage, to full membership of the Regiment, the sports and social facilities of Armoury House were at their disposal. Funds to eke out the small official allowance were provided by a grant of £100 from the Court; but still more by subscriptions from members and in particular from officers of the Cadet Battalion themselves.

The Battalion made their second public appearance in June 1942 at a joint Home Guard–Cadet parade. By August they were sufficiently under way to send 100 cadets to the first of the annual camps—in the huts of a disused A.A. gun site at Enfield. Their visitors—who included the Colonel Commandant, Lord Galway, and Major Arthur Henderson (3 Company, 1914), Under-Secretary of State for War—did not fail to observe how the keenness of the officers in imparting, and of the cadets in absorbing, the military arts and sciences overcame the disadvantages of a not very inspiring terrain.

The effect was seen in the results of their first War Certificate A examination in November 1942. Twenty-five candidates sat; 25 passed. No small share of the credit goes to their officer-tutors, Lieuts. D. K. Rigby, C. F. Schooling and R. H. Tomkins, and to Regimental Sergeant Major C. N. Freeman (1 Company, 1915) whose services had been placed at the cadets' disposal by that good friend of the Battalion, Lieut.-Colonel J. Bamford Smith, commanding 13 (H.D.) Royal Fusiliers, in which the H.A.C. National Defence Companies had been absorbed.

Further evidence of progress was the appointment in 1943 of the first three Cadet Officers, two of whom—Major P. C. W. Hyne and Captain M. J. Wookey—remained as members of the Regiment; the third, 2/Lieut. R. C. Allen, R.E., being killed in action in the first few months of his Army career.

By now the Cadets were combining, with their warlike training, the performance of those ceremonial duties in the City which, in peacetime, had been the traditional function of the Infantry Battalion. Their soldierly turnout on many historic occasions was noted. Distinguished visitors testified, by their presence at Armoury House, their interest in the young unit. Field-Marshal Lord Gort, V.C., the newly-appointed Colonel Commandant, found time, during a brief leave from Malta, to drop in on a drill night. Sir Samuel Joseph, Lord Mayor in 1943, was among the officers' guests in mess.

Lord Mayor's Day 1943 was a memorable occasion for the Battalion, when they paraded at the Guildhall as guard of honour for Sir Frank Newson-Smith, the newly chosen Lord Mayor. Despite the prevalence of "doodle bugs", Sir Frank inspected the Battalion in June 1944, dining with the officers, in company with the Lord Mayor of Bristol, after the parade.

By now the Cadet Battalion had established themselves as a permanent H.A.C. unit. The year of Victory gave them many opportunities of deputising for their elder brethren of the Infantry Battalion, not yet reconstituted; as when, in November 1945, they provided a guard of honour for the Lord Mayor and marched in his procession with a detachment from the Royal Artillery Depot, Woolwich, every member of which had served in the Western Desert with 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment R.H.A. Among other events of that year was the parade at the Mansion House when General Eisenhower and Field-Marshal Lord Alexander received the thanks of the City of London.

Though it lies, in point of time, outside the scope of this history, it may well be recorded that the Cadets deputised, in the post-war interval, for the Artillery as well as the Infantry of the H.A.C. After much punctilious training under Lieut. J. Wyatt Williams (A Battery, 1925) they fired on 13 May 1946, on the ninth anniversary of the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the Royal Salute from the guns of the Tower of London.

Perhaps the most fitting occasion to mark the culmination of their wartime service was the ceremony when—on the return of these cherished emblems to Armoury House from safer wartime lodging—the Lord Mayor handed to the H.A.C. Cadet Battalion the Colours of the Regiment.

THE COLONELS COMMANDANT

AT the outbreak of war the Honourable Artillery Company were commanded by Colonel the Earl Fortescue, M.C. His appointment as Colonel Commandant had followed the departure in February 1934 of Colonel the Viscount Galway, D.S.O., O.B.E., who, having held the post for one year, had become Governor-General of New Zealand.

As Viscount Ebrington, Lord Fortescue had fought in France with his Regiment, the Royal Scots Greys, in 1914-15; had been twice wounded and had been awarded the Military Cross. Retiring from the Regular Army in 1922, he had commanded 96 (Royal North Devon Yeomanry) Brigade R.A. (T.A.) from 1925 to 1931. In 1932 he succeeded to the peerage.

Just after hostilities began the H.A.C. lost, on 25 November 1939, their first Colonel Commandant[1]—a leader, benefactor and comrade whose name will never cease to be remembered with affection in the Company's annals. The Earl of Denbigh had, as Viscount Feilding, fought as a Regular gunner at Tel-el-Kebir. He retired as a captain, after 10 years' service, in 1888. In 1892 he succeeded to the peerage as 9th Earl of Denbigh and 8th Earl of Desmond; and in the following year, at the age of 34, was appointed Lieut.-Colonel Commanding the H.A.C.

For 40 years he held the command, combining the post, from 1903, with that of President.

From the first, he devoted himself to ensuring that the H.A.C. should become an efficient unit of the Armed Forces. He at once began a campaign with the War Office to obtain something more realistic in the way of armament than the Field Battery's archaic 9-pounder muzzle-loaders. It took him five years, but he succeeded at last in securing 15-pounder breech-loaders such as the Regular Army used; and when the C.I.V. 12-pounder Q.F. Battery, raised and officered by the H.A.C., sailed for the South African War in 1900 they went out, thanks largely to him, as an artillery unit efficient and well found; as were the H.A.C. Mounted Infantry and Infantry Detachments which, with his enthusiastic support, the Company also contributed to the C.I.V.[2]

By 1914 Lord Denbigh had commanded 21 annual training camps and, when 1 Battalion left for France, was able to wish them God-speed confident that, in spirit and efficiency, they would prove worthy of the Company's traditions. The Batteries he had under his own eye, for as C.R.A. 2 Mounted Division he sailed with them and for a year watched them win their spurs. Later he served with G.H.Q. Home Forces. He himself lost his two younger sons in battle. One, a Lieut.-Commander R.N., was killed at Jutland. The other, captain in the Coldstream Guards, died of wounds in Flanders.

The war over, Lord Denbigh provided a new outlet for public service when, at the personal request of Lieut.-General Sir Nevil Macready, the then Commissioner of Police, he founded the H.A.C. Special Constabulary, of which he was the first Commandant. Declining health curtailed his activities in later years, but he never failed to put in an appearance at camp or on special occasions at Headquarters.

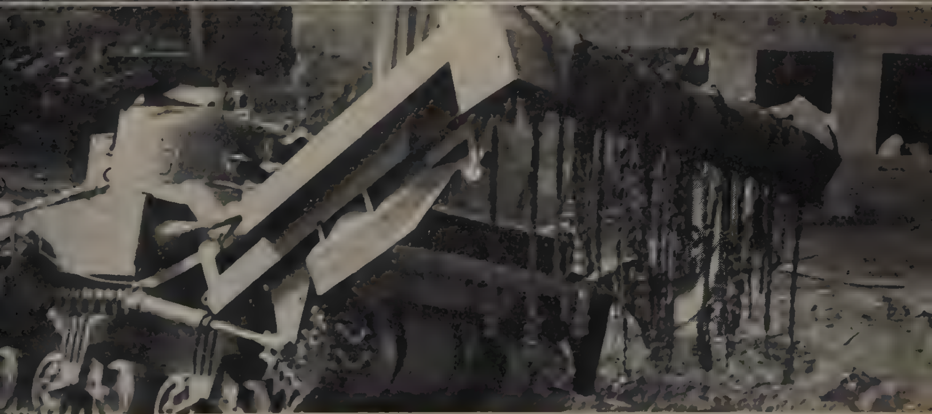
One of the leading Roman Catholics in England, he was a Count of the Holy Roman Empire and holder of the highest orders of the Papacy, Spain and Portugal; and on relinquishing command of the Company he was awarded the G.C.V.O. Though throughout his tenure the H.A.C. were first in his thoughts, his services to the country were by no means confined to Company affairs. Among many other activities, he was the father of the sugar-beet industry and his pioneer work led to the opening of England's first sugar-beet factory.

No commander was ever held in greater affection by his officers and men. His singing of "Alouette" became almost as much a Company tradition as Regimental Fire. The stentorian "O-oh!"

OPPOSITE

WEAPONS OF ARMOURED WARFARE

(13 Regt.) 1. Tanks bringing up fascines to help in crossing the Odon. 2. A German 88-mm. gun, silenced—but at a heavy price. 3. A mine-sweeping Flail—blown up by mines. (12 Regt.) 4. German Tiger Tank, knocked out between Tunis and Medjez.



which preceded each chorus on one occasion stampeded the horse lines. His comradeship extended to the smallest of fry. If the writer of this book may intrude one solitary personal note, it is to recall the occasion when, as a private, he was visited in camp by his father who, having missed the homeward train, was hospitably lodged for the night in the Colonel Commandant's own tent.

Lord Fortescue's period of command covered many notable events in the Company's history; the Coronation of King George VI, His Majesty's assumption of command as Captain General and his inspection of the Regiment; the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the grant of the Royal Charter with its visit from the Ancients; the visit to them on their 300th anniversary; the mounting of the King's Guard at Buckingham Palace (performed for the first time by a unit of the Territorial Army); the modernisation of the Batteries and the expansion of the Artillery Division to nine Batteries; the formation of 86 (H.A.C.) Regiment H.A.A.; the organisation of the Battalion as an Officer Cadet Training Unit; the outbreak of war and the appointment to commissions of some 2800 other ranks.[3]

When Lord Fortescue's tenure expired the Company were delighted to welcome back Lord Galway, on his retirement from the post of Governor-General of New Zealand. He had gone to France in 1914 with 1 Life Guards (which he subsequently commanded). Serving in many staff appointments, he had been awarded the D.S.O. and O.B.E. In 1933 he succeeded Lord Denbigh as Colonel Commandant.

When selected for the post of Governor-General he had noted, as his one regret, the fact that he must relinquish command of the H.A.C. and the mutual attachment which had grown between himself and all ranks. Now, with abounding energy, he applied himself again to the Company's interests, undertaking innumerable journeys to inspect the scattered units and devoting much thought to the continuance in some form of the Infantry Battalion. His death in 1943 deprived the H.A.C. of a leader whom all ranks held in high esteem.

The choice of his successor could not have been a happier one. Field-Marshal Viscount Gort came to the H.A.C. with a world-

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OPPOSITE

THE GUNS. 12 REGIMENT

UPPER: *Ayr, October 1941. Preparing for inspection by H.M. the Captain General.*

LOWER: *Farewell to arms at Padua, November 1945.*

wide reputation as a soldier. From Sandhurst he had been commissioned into the Grenadier Guards and had accompanied Sir Douglas Haig to France as A.D.C. As Brigade Major and later in command of 4 Grenadier Guards he had already won the M.C. and the D.S.O. with two bars when, leading 1 Grenadier Guards at Flesquières, he had sustained his fourth wound (a severe one, despite which he carried on) and earned the Victoria Cross. In 1939, having held the highest posts—Director of Military Training, Commandant of the Staff College, Military Secretary and finally C.I.G.S.—he assumed command of the British Expeditionary Force.

After Dunkirk and a spell as Inspector General he had spent a year as Governor of Gibraltar. Then, as Governor and Commander-in-Chief Malta, he began one of the greatest episodes of his career. His arrival—marked by the 2300th air raid on the island fortress—inspired and encouraged the civilian population during their darkest hour. His solicitude for their welfare and rehabilitation, when that hour was past, established him in the islanders' affections. The warmth of their farewell when, in August 1944, his stay among them came to an end was unique in their history.

Various exigencies of the moment prevented the Colonel Commandant from visiting 11 (H.A.C.) Regiment during their short stay off Malta on their return from Sicily,[4] but he took the earliest opportunity to be among them in North Africa. During his infrequent and brief spells of leave, and the few months that elapsed between his departure from Malta and his appointment, in October 1944, as High Commissioner for Palestine and Transjordan Lord Gort made it clear that his interest in the Company was no distant or formal one. He inspected units and presided at Courts. Though his devotion to his other high duties never prevented his keeping in close touch with H.A.C. affairs and achievements, H.M. the Captain General directed that a Deputy Colonel Commandant should act for him during his absence abroad, and Colonel H. W. O'Brien, M.C., T.D., was selected.

Lord Gort's lamented death on 31 March 1946 deprived the H.A.C. of a leader whose appointment will ever be a source of pride to the Company.

The tenure of command of Lord Gort's two successors falls, strictly, outside the time limits of this book. Not wholly, however. The name of Field-Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, G.C.B., O.M., D.S.O., is inextricably entwined with the history of the war. As

Commander-in-Chief Home Forces after the return of the Expeditionary Force—with which he had served as G.O.C. II Corps—he had all H.A.C. units under his sway, and as C.I.G.S. from December 1941 he became in many respects arbiter of their destinies.

His appointment as Colonel Commandant on 16 August 1946 was greeted by the Regiment with the warmest enthusiasm. His guidance during the difficult post-war years was of enormous value in establishing the Company's future and his continued association with the H.A.C. as a member of the Veteran Company, after his relinquishment of the command on 16 August 1954, is evidence of his continuing interest.

In welcoming, as successor to this high post, Major General Sir Julian Gascoigne, K.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O., the H.A.C. were bringing on to their muster roll an officer who had soldiered alongside them throughout some of their stiffest fighting. Having commanded a Battalion of his Regiment, the Grenadier Guards, in 1941 and 1942, he led for an eventful year (1942-43) 201 Guards Brigade. He was wounded in Italy and in 1943 was awarded the D.S.O. Thus he came to the H.A.C. familiar with their ways, sharing fully their pride of battle and imbued with the ancient traditions which it is now his proud duty to sustain.

NOTES

[1] The new designation of the post came into use between the two Wars.

[2] He had previously offered the H.A.C. as two units, artillery and infantry, but the authorities stipulated that these should become part of the C.I.V.

[3] The ultimate total was in the region of 4000.

[4] See page 139.

ARMOURY HOUSE[1]

IT would be an incomplete and ungrateful history that failed to record the debt which the Company as a whole, the individual members and the wartime units owed to the band of veterans and the staff who kept the flag flying at Armoury House throughout the war. The functions they performed were as varied as they were numerous.

Under the chairmanship of Major R. C. Cole, elected Vice-President following the death (30 June 1941) of Colonel Frank Farington, the Court of Assistants maintained their watch over the Company's affairs. On their shoulders fell heavy and anxious responsibilities when Hitler's blitz not only endangered and often damaged the fabric of the House itself, but, by its destruction of the Company's rent-producing properties around the Artillery Garden, jeopardised the finances and involved the Court in an infinity of problems of tenure, war damage compensation and interim maintenance.[2]

Under the direction of the Company's Secretary and Historian, Major G. Goold Walker, D.S.O., M.C., and his deputy, Major C. A. J. Whyte, T.D.,[3] thousands of columns of Army Lists, *London Gazettes* and Casualty Lists were scanned for data which, reinforced by the constant flow of letters from members serving all over the world, were to provide a record of the war services of every member of the Company. The 1939 Blue Book containing particulars, largely in Goold Walker's own hand, of 5125 members will remain an important item in the Company's archives.

From Armoury House, also, the JOURNAL's wartime numbers continued to appear, linking members in every arm of the Service, in every theatre of war. In due time a fresh labour fell upon the keepers of the records—the tracing of prisoners and the alleviation of their lot through the Prisoners of War Fund which figured among the major activities of Armoury House.

The veterans who gathered here, sharing such attenuated fare as the Sutling Committee were still able to provide, kept alive, as far as the exigencies of the times allowed, the Company's tradition of hospitality. D Battery's dance on 9 January 1940 was the last evening function held in Armoury House. The plate and trophies, the vellum books and pictures—all the Company's valued possessions, in fact, except Lily and Nellie of the Sutling Room[4]—were removed to a place of safety. In the austere atmosphere of early 1940, however, the Company were able to welcome, thanks to these same veterans, visitors from the American Association and Boston Club, and to give a lunch to the Royal 22nd Regiment of Canada on the occasion of their mounting guard at Buckingham Palace. (This was the Regiment which, when the H.A.C. Delegation visited the Ancients in June 1938, had hospitably entertained them in Quebec.)

Perhaps the chief service the veterans, still clinging to their ancient home, rendered to the Company was that they constituted, so to speak, a garrison for Armoury House and the Artillery Garden. Whatever military or other bodies might find lodgment at Headquarters—either at the invitation of the Court or by the fiat of Higher Authority—the presence of this "garrison" served as a reminder that this was the military home of nine units on active service elsewhere, as well as thousands of individual officers now serving in other arms, and was destined again to be their home when, hostilities over, they were re-united. Of such a reminder there was no little need, in the days when—as usual during Britain's wars—a hundred authorities, each omnipotent and omniscient but by no means at one in aim or method, cast covetous eyes on every covered or open space.

It was a matter of no great urgency while the Company's active units, before their final assimilation into their formations, fulfilled the time-honoured routine of defending vulnerable points in London: while, too, 86 Regiment remained on anti-aircraft guard around the Metropolis.

As long as they maintained their identity as H.A.C. units, the National Defence Companies merged in 13 (H.D.) Battalion Royal Fusiliers kept a foothold in Armoury House. Their linked Bomb Disposal Squad had its home in 22 Bunhill Row, whose basement housed various salvaged bombs until one went off, causing casualties. For a brief moment on its journey to demolition in Hackney Marshes the Artillery Garden received the huge unexploded bomb which Lieut. R. Davies, R.E., had dug out from the near neighbourhood of St. Paul's Cathedral, winning the George Cross for his intrepidity.

In the intervals, however, there was always some danger that Armoury House and its precincts might be deemed to be "vacated" by the H.A.C.—an idea which the constant attendance of this band of veterans helped to refute.

Indeed, Headquarters was the scene of many unaccustomed activities. In the autumn of 1939 the L.C.C. erected, in the garden, one of the largest steel static water tanks in London, the supporting banks of which produced crops of the most succulent spring onions. In the following April, Armoury House became the centre for the issue, to all troops including Home Guard in the North Eastern Metropolitan Area, of welcome supplies from America of rifles, ammunition and bombs, to replace those which feckless Governments in the years between the wars had frittered away for scrap metal.

Stragglers and small parties from Dunkirk collected and reformed at Armoury House. In August 1940 Operation Lunardi[5] was repeated, when a barrage balloon was installed, which remained until the spring of 1944.

Refugees crowded the Garden during the early stages of the blitz, sheltering in its primitive P.A.D. trenches. It was thronged in later stages with Indian lascars of the Royal Pioneer Corps and Italian prisoners of war, filling craters and tidying up bomb damage.

For two years, from March 1942, a radar "searchlight", to direct damaged aircraft returning to their bases, remained in the grounds. It suffered severe damage—not from bombs, but from a "sixer" which some slogger put through the glass when cricket was tentatively revived. (Netting protection was thereafter installed.)

It is worthy of note that, despite the vicissitudes of the Artillery Garden, the cricket pitch remained unscathed throughout the war. There was just the suggestion, when the barrage balloon arrived, that its anchorage should be sited in the middle of the pitch. Major Cole and Major Whyte did not *object*, but they did mention diffidently that . . . . The sporting Sapper in charge took the point at once—"Musn't let Hitler interfere with cricket"—and cast anchor a little nearer Bunhill Row.

For a few months in 1941, Armoury House was requisitioned as Headquarters for N.E. Sub Area. Later the City of London Territorial Association were housed there, and in 1944 half the house was requisitioned, at a rental agreed with the Court, for an A.A. Regiment and subsequently other units.

More drastic was a Ministry of Fuel project, in the same year, to turn House and Garden into a gigantic fuel dump. This was thwarted by Home Forces, who had a rival scheme, which also proved abortive, for wiring in the Garden as a prisoner of war cage. It did, however, become a dump for weapons and field stores when the Home Guard stood down. Their "Molotov cocktails", being (rightly) deemed too dangerous to move, were buried in the north-east corner.

U.S. soldiers attached to the Service Centre Book Depot worked for some time in the Drill Hall which, after D Day, became a newspaper despatching centre for the Forces. Last of Armoury House's strange functions, it was the scene of the highly secret restoration to the Bank of England of its gold reserve, transferred from its war-time refuge in the country. The bullion arrived one night and throughout the next day was carted to the Bank in heavily guarded convoys.

Armoury House was honoured by several royal visits. On the day after the Battalion marched out, H.M. the Queen inspected, in the Artillery Garden, the City of London A.T.S. During his inspection of the H.A.C. National Defence Companies (13 Battalion Royal Fusiliers),[6] H.M. the King paid a visit to the detachment maintained at Armoury House. Many parades of historic note took place. On 1 August 1940 the City of London Home Defence Volunteers (later Home Guard) paraded under Colonel the Hon. G. K. M. Mason, later Lord Blackford. The Lord Mayor (Sir John Laurie) reviewed the City Home Guard and Army Cadet Force in 1942, and, later in the year, by the Court's permission, 2 London Rifle Brigade before their departure overseas. Innumerable propaganda processions at various stages of the war assembled in the Ground.

But it is Armoury House's ordeal throughout the bombing raids which will remain longest in the Company's memory.

The menace approached when at 0015 hours on 25 August 1940 the first bombs fell on the City—in Fore Street. Danger from drifting sparks led to a trailer pump being issued, but how to work it no one knew, and there were some drenchings of superiors, said to be entirely accidental, in the process of learning.

The heavy raiding which began in September, and continued nightly without a break until 8 December, left Armoury House astonishingly unscarred, though on Sunday 18 October the ground was machine-gunned by a lone German aircraft which burst through the heavy cloud. The barrage balloon, grounded at the time, was the only casualty.

Immunity ceased, however, when on 27 December the bombing was resumed. In the great fire raid on the City, on the night 29/30 December, a thermit bomb on the west wing started a threatening fire, which was put out by a fire brigade from Berkshire, who happened to be passing down the City Road on their way to help blazing London. Their escape ladder, impaled on the Company's crest above the gate, led to the dismantling of the ironwork which, with the gates, was removed for preservation. No efforts, however, could save the Company's properties around the Garden, many of which were entirely destroyed.

Ordinary incendiaries were dealt with by the Armoury House Staff—so efficiently that Croucher, Dare, Romaine and Sullivan received the thanks of the Court for their prompt agility.

During the night of 11/12 January 1941 the ground was heavily cratered by H.E. bombs but the House was untouched, though a "bread basket" of incendiaries fell inside the City Road gate—failing, fortunately, to open. One incendiary hit the House on the night of the 500-bomber raid (16 April), falling through the roof of the west wing into a lavatory water tank, whence it was "souvenired" for exhibition. Thence onwards a section of the Fire Service were installed in the ground, with a larger pump and canvas dams (which promptly froze); and regular piquets from the City's Home Guard were posted.

Blast bombs of a new type scarred the fabric on the night 10/11 May, and many incendiaries fell. Some of the latter lodged on the guttering between the House and the Drill Hall roof. They were almost unreachable, as all the recently installed access ladders had been blown away. The north wing of Finsbury Barracks, an alternative route, had been hit by H.E. No help could be got: the telephones were all out of order. By an almost incredible effort, six young Home Guardsmen of 3 City of London Battalion, under an even younger lance-corporal, succeeded in reaching the roof and saved the House. The leader was subsequently officially commended for gallantry despite the fact that he had, from his vantage point, inadvertently in pure Hoxton vernacular instructed the Sub-District Commander (A.F.S.) to remove himself to an even warmer place.

In the ground, however, blast caused several casualties. Corporal Wright of the H.A.C. National Defence Companies was killed and three others wounded when a sandbagged Nissen hut was demolished. Fusilier Meadows, in the orderly room, was killed, as were two Metropolitan Water Board employees, in their offices in Bunhill Row. The raid virtually completed the destruction of the Company's properties around the ground, which was thenceforth, until the end of the war, ringed with shattered ruins.

Mention of this disaster, in Major Cole's periodical news-letter to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Boston, invoked (though he had no such intention in mind) a spontaneous and generous gesture from the daughter Company—a cheque for $5000 towards the Company funds. It was by no means the only evidence of the Ancients' warm affection. The Prisoners of War Fund had been swollen by their spontaneous contributions. Earlier in the war they had offered to receive and maintain, for the duration, children of members and, if necessary, their mothers. For these gestures H.M. the King—Captain General of the parent, and an honorary member of the daughter Company—expressed his thanks in special messages. No members actually took advantage of the offer as, following the torpedoing of a ship carrying children, the Government declined to permit further evacuations—but it remained, and remains still, unforgettable evidence of the ties of affection and hospitality which unite the two Companies.

NOTES

[1] The author is indebted, for much that appears here, to the racy narrative of Lieut.-Colonel Donovan Jackson, O.B.E., Secretary of the City of London Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association, which appeared in the JOURNAL of April/May 1954.

[2] Rents dropped from £4670 in 1939 to £493 in 1943.

[3] On Major Goold Walker's appointment as Lieut.-Colonel Commanding City of London Home Guard A.A. Batteries, "Charlie" Whyte (2 Company, 1900), one of the best-known members of the Company, was appointed Deputy Secretary.

[4] The long and faithful service of Mrs. (Lily) Cox and Miss (Nellie) Sullivan, especially during the war years, was commemorated, on their retirement at the conclusion of peace, by a testimonial.

[5] On 15 September 1784, Vincent Lunardi, Secretary to the Neapolitan Ambassador and, as he put it, the first "aerial traveller in the English atmosphere" ascended from the Artillery Ground accompanied by a dog and cat, in a balloon filled with "inflammable air" provided by the action of vitriolic acid on zinc. The Prince of Wales was among the throng who watched the ascent. One of the oars with which Lunardi was to guide the balloon fell to earth, so affecting one old lady—who mistook it for the aeronaut himself—that she expired on the spot. Lunardi landed at North Mimms and, again ascending, finally came to earth near Ware, where some farm labourers mistook him for the Devil. His feat, says Goold Walker's History, made him the hero of the hour. The Court elected him a member of the Company, and wearing their uniform he was presented to the King.

See page 339.

PUBLIC LIBRAR

APPENDIX I

THE ROLL OF HONOUR

11 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT, R.H.A.

Calais

Gnr. L. J. A. Crouch (*att. East Riding Yeomanry*)

Agheila

Lieut. J. L. F. Armitage
Lieut. H. F. C. Tompson
2/Lieut. W. M. Hart
Sergt. M. J. T. Town
L/Sergt. H. J. Harold
L/Bdr. G. A. Colwell
Gnr. D. Godfrey
Gnr. D. Grindey
Gnr. E. L. K. Hill
Gnr. W. E. Hughes
Gnr. A. Shea
Gnr. R. A. G. Steels
Sgmn. E. J. Dorney

"H" Troop Action

Lieut. J. W. Venning
Sergt. V. B. M. Banbury
Sergt. J. E. Steventon
L/Bdr. V. C. Buckland
L/Bdr. A. H. Russell
Gnr. H. F. Brazington
Gnr. H. L. V. House
Gnr. T. Lloyd
Gnr. L. Sheldon

Pre-Knightsbridge

Cpl. C. Fell
Gnr. A. T. Hughes

Knightsbridge

Major H. Bourne
Major J. R. O. Charlton
Major J. W. Hopkins
Lieut. M. V. Boys
Lieut. A. F. Worthington
2/Lieut. F. C. Haldin
2/Lieut. C. G. A. Leechman
2/Lieut. R. Leftwich
2/Lieut. R. H. Macdonald
B.S.M. J. H. Thorns
B.S.M. S. A. J. Trotman
S/Sergt. A. Goodman
Sergt. J. W. Deakin
Sergt. G. M. Nicoll
Sergt. H. Rowntree
Sergt. A. D. Sneddon
Sergt. B. J. Swingler
Sergt. S. M. Tompkinson
Sergt. J. W. Villette
L/Sergt. L. R. Callaghan
L/Sergt. G. T. Dando
L/Sergt. D. Maddox
L/Sergt. N. Rishton
L/Sergt. G. Terry
Bdr. W. J. R. Boardman
Bdr. C. P. Brown
Bdr. G. H. Clark
Bdr. N. S. Donaldson
Bdr. A. W. Farquhar
Bdr. J. E. Hayward
Bdr. E. C. Holcroft
Bdr. F. J. Ironton
Bdr. G. J. Lawley
Bdr. L. J. Nunn
Bdr. H. R. Parry
Bdr. A. C. Smith
Bdr. J. C. Tinsley
L/Bdr. R. Best
L/Bdr. H. Cook
L/Bdr. H. D. Crutchley
L/Bdr. C. M. Davies
L/Bdr. H. J. Noble
L/Bdr. S. G. Spaull
L/Bdr. N. Whittingham
L/Bdr. J. H. Williams
Gnr. G. T. Allan
Gnr. S. Baker
Gnr. E. G. Balding

Gnr. L. Barker
Gnr. A. K. Chappell
Gnr. H. Chaytors
Gnr. A. J. Crowe
Gnr. G. J. Dodd
Gnr. G. Goltenboth
Gnr. D. W. Griffiths
Gnr. C. F. Haywood
Gnr. G. Helm
Gnr. T. W. Hills
Gnr. J. Hingley
Gnr. E. Hobson
Gnr. F. A. Hodge
Gnr. H. A. Jeffreys
Gnr. A. Johnson
Gnr. G. A. Jones
Gnr. R. Jones
Gnr. F. Knight
Gnr. F. J. Mann
Gnr. G. L. O'Neill
Gnr. W. H. Parker
Gnr. A. L. Pratchett
Gnr. S. J. Radley
Gnr. C. Rogers
Gnr. J. C. Smith
Gnr. F. G. Wakelin
Gnr. R. F. Watts
Gnr. J. T. Webb
Gnr. E. A. Willis

El Alamein

Capt. S. A. G. Watt
Sergt. J. E. Baird
Bdr. W. J. Back
Bdr. G. C. Jeffries
Bdr. R. S. Williams
L/Cpl. W. E. Glennon
Gnr. A. G. Aldridge
Gnr. C. R. Bailey
Gnr. W. S. Cockburn
Gnr. H. C. Downie
Gnr. J. Goldston
Gnr. E. E. Hargreaves
Gnr. G. L. Hemming
Gnr. J. Malcolm
Gnr. S. A. Payne
Gnr. E. W. Rogers
Gnr. A. Shanks
Gnr. W. E. Smith
Gnr. L. Viney
Gnr. W. F. Walton
Gnr. F. W. White
Gnr. L. Williams

Tunisia

Major T. F. Butler-Stoney
Lieut. A. S. Humphreys
Lieut. B. H. S. Laskey
Sergt. J. R. Kettle (att. *I Corps*)
Bdr. E. Watson
L/Bdr. C. Edge
Gnr. J. W. Busby
Gnr. J. W. Shaw
Gnr. T. C. Smith
Gnr. F. B. Wilson

Sicily

Major D. Rowlandson
Capt. J. H. McAllum
L/Bdr. R. Harper
Gnr. A. A. Philip
Gnr. G. E. Pryke
Gnr. G. W. Richardson
Gnr. R. Stanford
Gnr. F. Wookey

Gothic Line

Capt. L. Q. Drage
Capt. A. W. Grant
Sergt. G. W. Smith
Bdr. A. M. Pennington
Bdr. H. L. G. Ward
L/Bdr. W. T. Holloway
Gnr. R. Hartley
Gnr. W. E. Heslop
Gnr. L. H. Hills
Gnr. D. Jenkins
Gnr. D. C. Webber

Senio to the Po

L/Bdr. A. M. Duckworth
Gnr. W. Morrison

Lost at Sea as Prisoners of War

B.Q.M.S. H. A. Murray
Sergt. W. G. Battle
Sergt. A. E. Chaplin
Sergt. P. E. Farrell
Sergt. A. H. Godden
L/Sergt. B. F. Dummott
L/Sergt. B. Edwards
Bdr. E. F. Cadman
Bdr. C. S. Lemon
L/Bdr. J. M. Green
L/Bdr. D. G. F. McGrath
Gnr. C. W. Bale
Gnr. J. A. Bestwick

Gnr. J. Bettany
Gnr. F. Biddulph
Gnr. G. Brown
Gnr. L. C. Chard
Gnr. F. W. Cheeseman
Gnr. M. B. Edge
Gnr. N. W. Erry
Gnr. J. Finbery
Gnr. R. Gibson
Gnr. A. Groden
Gnr. J. E. S. Hatley
Gnr. E. N. Hayes
Gnr. A. V. Hennessy
Gnr. J. E. Hopton
Gnr. G. W. Hurley
Gnr. P. D. Jackson
Gnr. D. M. Jones
Gnr. L. Lane
Gnr. M. J. Larner
Gnr. J. G. Mills
Gnr. A. C. Munro
Gnr. E. W. Nye
Gnr. F. J. Nye
Gnr. J. E. P. O'Brien
Gnr. D. A. Osborn
Gnr. T. E. Pearman
Gnr. J. J. Prosser
Gnr. W. R. Rangecroft
Gnr. J. Seel
Gnr. H. D. Simmons
Gnr. F. Sims
Gnr. T. Smith
Gnr. G. W. Snelling
Gnr. E. L. Stone
Gnr. A. A. H. Stretch
Gnr. J. A. Turner
Gnr. C. R. Willingham
Gnr. C. W. Wilson
Gnr. G. Worcester
Gnr. H. P. Wright

Died as Prisoners of War

Sergt. A. Straiton
L/Bdr. R. Graves
Gnr. C. A. S. Beer
Gnr. J. A. Cole
Gnr. S. Corden
Gnr. J. M. Griffiths
Gnr. W. Jones (*of wounds*)
Gnr. O. G. Lewis
Gnr. J. McCracken
Gnr. E. Moxon
Gnr. W. Preshous
Gnr. E. D. L. Shaw
Gnr. R. M. Taylor (*of wounds*)

Killed on Active Service

Capt. C. D. Earle
Sergt. H. B. Wright
L/Bdr. V. Clegg
Gnr. H. I. Dorell
Gnr. S. J. Macallan
Gnr. E. W. Robinson
Gnr. W. Rooney

Died on or as a result of Active Service

Sergt. E. Weaver
L/Bdr. A. E. Gardner
Gnr. D. Campbell
Gnr. E. D. W. Daniel
Gnr. C. H. Pearce
Gnr. C. A. Porter
Gnr. G. Treharne
Gnr. J. L. Whitehouse

12 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT, R.H.A.

North Africa

Major M. J. V. Perry
Lieut. G. W. M. Swallow
Lieut. H. C. Swift
B.S.M. R. Mackenzie
Sergt. F. S. Davies
Sergt. C. G. Hughes
Sergt. J. C. Lawrie
Sergt. R. Temple
L/Sergt. D. L. Hodson
L/Sergt. T. A. Stott
Bdr. P. W. R. McGregor
Bdr. R. E. B. Neish
Bdr. J. Rennie
Bdr. D. Strain
L/Bdr. J. C. Keddie
L/Bdr. F. V. Lander
L/Bdr. T. S. Rowan
L/Bdr. A. Williams
L/Bdr. S. Winter
Gnr. D. Cooper
Gnr. J. A. Cooper
Gnr. J. W. Dickerson
Gnr. F. Forth
Gnr. G. H. Gould
Gnr. D. Hagyard

Gnr. T. Kenny
Gnr. E. Miles
Gnr. J. H. Newton
Gnr. P. E. Pickersgill
Gnr. S. Rimmer
Gnr. E. Ryan
Gnr. W. K. Sharpe
Gnr. R. W. F. Sheppard
Gnr. R. F. Sutton
Gnr. H. Tate
Gnr. J. W. Thompson
Gnr. H. A. Voss
Gnr. J. Walsh
Gnr. J. Ward
Gnr. W. V. White
Gnr. T. L. Wilkinson
Gnr. R. R. Wilson
Gnr. E. Wroth

Italy

Lieut. E. C. Freeman
Lieut. G. N. Holbrook
Lieut. H. W. M. McNicholas
L/Sergt. S. T. Powell
L/Sergt. B. Preston
Bdr. W. Bennetts
Bdr. W. A. J. Lambert
Bdr. T. White
L/Bdr. C. Clough
L/Bdr. S. Gilchrist
L/Bdr. C. H. Holding
L/Bdr. S. V. Leach
L/Bdr. G. V. Leech
L/Bdr. H. H. Mash
Gnr. H. Binnie
Gnr. R. A. J. Blackwell
Gnr. D. A. Broadbent
Gnr. G. S. Collins
Gnr. J. J. Crosbie
Gnr. W. S. Dring
Gnr. E. Gent
Gnr. A. Glascoe
Gnr. A. Goldberg
Gnr. W. Gustard
Gnr. A. H. M. Haynes
Gnr. T. Hodson
Dvr. D. J. Jones (*R. Sigs.*)
Gnr. F. E. Jones
Gnr. L. Lyon
Gnr. A. G. Maskell
Gnr. J. A. Mease
Gnr. H. H. Morley
Gnr. D. E. Morris
Gnr. T. M. O'Brien
Gnr. J. Ormrod
Gnr. A. Patching
Gnr. E. V. Phillips
Gnr. D. C. Probert
Gnr. P. Ricketts
Gnr. P. R. Sketchley
Gnr. A. F. Stansfield
Gnr. F. Thomson
Gnr. C. Turner
Gnr. H. Turpin
Gnr. D. Veevers
Gnr. W. Young

Killed on Active Service

Bdr. G. V. Brown
Gnr. F. Baller
Gnr. G. P. Bright
Gnr. C. J. Cocks
Gnr. G. E. R. Duncombe

Died as Prisoner of War

L/Bdr. G. E. Johnson

Died of Sickness on Active Service

R.S.M. D. S. Macleod
Bdr. L. T. Clive

13 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT, R.H.A.

Normandy

Capt. C. P. Vivian
Lieut. E. A. Barson
Lieut. A. P. Stanford
Sergt. J. Clark
Sergt. V. D. McGill
Sergt. S. S. Woolger
L/Sergt. P. Willis
Bdr. M. H. W. Fraser
Bdr. J. Hallinan
Bdr. C. Pyle
Gnr. S. A. Blackburn
Gnr. J. W. Cawte
Gnr. A. F. Edmonds
Gnr. R. H. Ellicott
Gnr. F. E. Enever
Gnr. E. T. Jones
Gnr. F. Kirkham
Gnr. F. S. Morriss
Gnr. P. O'Malley

Gnr. J. O'Rourke
Gnr. H. W. T. Percival
Gnr. H. J. Shaw
Gnr. N. Weir
Gnr. J. E. Wood

Amiens and Antwerp

Lieut. A. P. G. Bluett
Bdr. L. W. Hudson
Gnr. W. H. Bawn
Gnr. E. Dawson
Gnr. T. A. Graham
Gnr. G. J. Halladay
Gnr. D. McDonald

Belgium and Holland

Bdr. L. J. Flack
L/Bdr. W. J. Giles
Gnr. L. F. Adams
Gnr. G. H. W. Bannister
Gnr. B. J. Clare
Gnr. H. T. Cook
Gnr. J. W. Nash

Gnr. J. Smith
Gnr. R. Tothill
Gnr. C. Willis

Germany

Capt. G. D. H. Budgen
B.S.M. E. C. Watts
Cpl. W. R. Robinson (*R. Sigs.*)
Gnr. A. Bulman
Gnr. F. Cownie
Gnr. H. Stansbury
Sgmn. R. J. Bentham (*R. Sigs.*)
Sgmn. W. Connell (*R. Sigs.*)

Accidentally killed on Active Service

L/Bdr. J. Moran
Gnr. W. R. Buchanan
Gnr. W. Lockett

Died of Sickness on Active Service

L/Bdr. A. Blackith
Gnr. T. W. Culshaw
Gnr. T. Ellis

86 (H.A.C.) HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, R.A.

Major W. A. Clark
Sergt. H. Wright
Gnr. A. W. Boxell
Gnr. L. A. Breeze
Gnr. C. Crowther
Gnr. W. D. Thoms
Gnr. A. Young

Accidentally killed on Active Service

B.S.M. J. H. Shepherd

Died on Active Service

Gnr. L. M. Bullwinkle

275 (H.A.C.) HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY, R.A.

Major H. J. Finch
B.S.M. J. W. T. Grimshaw
Cpl. L. Farrell
Gnr. A. O. Brown
Gnr. C. Corby
Gnr. C. F. Curtis
Gnr. C. H. Gabrielson
Gnr. W. Hough
Gnr. W. Hudson
Gnr. P. W. S. Selby
Gnr. G. Walsh

446 (H.A.C.) HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY, R.A.

Gnr. P. J. L. Fiest
Gnr. T. Smith

H.A.C. COMPANIES 13 (HOME DEFENCE) BATTALION, ROYAL FUSILIERS

Killed in Action

Cpl. J. O'Mahony
Cpl. F. A. P. Wright
Fus. C. P. Meadows
Fus. G. E. Spicer

Died on Active Service

Capt. A. J. Beaumont
Fus. D. Kirby

MEMBERS OF THE HONOURABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY WHO FELL IN ACTION OR DIED WHILE SERVING WITH OTHER UNITS

Royal Navy

C.P.O. S. W. Snelling (Armoury House Staff)

Fleet Air Arm

Lieut. G. B. Pudney (4 Coy. 1936)

Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve

P.O. E. S. English (1 Coy. 1932)

Royal Marines

Lieut. T. B. Carothers (H.Q. Coy. 1927)

The Queen's Bays (2 Dragoon Guards)

Capt. I. P. Goold Walker (A.A. 1939)

3 *King's Own Hussars*

Capt. R. H. Le Bas (C Bty. 1940)

8 *King's Royal Irish Hussars*

Lieut. G. F. F. Douse (A.A. 1941)

13/18 (*Royal*) *Hussars* (*Queen Mary's Own*)

Lieut. M. A. Ritchie (A Bty. 1938)

24 *Lancers*

2/Lieut. J. H. Crane (A Bty. 1927)

Royal Armoured Corps

2/Lieut. N. Carman (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. C. R. Gould (A.A. 1939)

Royal Tank Regt.

Capt. A. O. Lott (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. W. B. Sant (4 Coy. 1936)
Lieut. G. Bullett (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. C. L. Cowan (D Bty. 1939)
2/Lieut. B. R. Cushing (11 Regt. 1939)
2/Lieut. L. J. Hotson (C Bty. 1939)
2/Lieut. A. Rhodes (A Bty. 1939)

Reconnaissance Corps

Capt. S. C. Fordham (3 Coy. 1933)

Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry (*Prince of Wales's Own*)

2/Lieut. C. G. Kirby (D Bty. 1939)

Staffordshire Yeomanry (*Queen's Own Royal Regiment*)

Capt. J. G. Tyrell (C Bty. 1939)

Royal Artillery

Brig. W. A. Sheil (B Bty. 1941)
Lt.-Col. J. M. Davies (1 Coy. 1920)
Major J. T. M. Appleby (A Bty. 1939)
Major O. C. H. Burton (G Bty. 1943)
Major A. W. Ellis (A Bty. 1933; A.A. 1939)
Major J. D. C. Ellison (F Bty. 1942)
Major P. Hazell (D Bty. 1939)
Major R. C. Nightingale (2 Coy. 1936)
Major C. M. Ogden Smith, H.A.C. (att. *Special Air Service*) (1 Coy. 1927; A.A. 1939)
Major L. V. Stribling (A.A. 1939)
Major E. V. E. White (A.A. 1939)
Major C. E. M. Wiggins (A.A. 1939)
Capt. P. R. Alexander (C Bty. 1940)
Capt. B. E. Allan (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. K. E. Allanson (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. C. C. Ballyn (A Bty. 1936)
Capt. P. M. Bennett, R.H.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. P. M. Britton, H.A.C., R.H.A. (A Bty. 1936)
Capt. D. G. Castle (A.A. 1939)
Capt. P. Cohen (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. Cooper (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. R. G. Course (A Bty. 1932)
Capt. G. C. Daniel (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. G. S. de Jonge, R.H.A. (B Bty. 1936)

Capt. G. H. Dickie (B Bty. 1935)
Capt. A. R. Forster, R.H.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. P. S. Y. Garrett (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. J. C. Gaye (A Bty. 1938)
Capt. W. H. Gill (B Bty. 1939)
Capt. R. A. Harrison-Austin, R.H.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Capt. N. Hayes (A.A. 1940)
Capt. S. A. Heald (A Bty. 1935)
Capt. P. Hoare (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. A. E. Howorth (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. R. B. Hutt (B Bty. 1939)
Capt. F. M. Jackson (A Bty. 1938)
Capt. E. G. Jamieson (A Bty. 1938)
Capt. E. A. Knight (A Bty. 1935)
Capt. J. D. Landale (B Bty. 1935)
Capt. G. W. Lloyd (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. J. S. Loram (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. C. H. Lucy (B Bty. 1939)
Capt. L. W. Marten (A.A. 1939)
Capt. R. H. Mills (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. W. S. Molison (B Bty. 1933)
Capt. P. H. Newson-Smith (A Bty. 1936)
Capt. C. W. R. Oddie (1 Coy. 1935)
Capt. G. W. D. Ormerod (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. I. G. Pattison (B Bty. 1939)
Capt. H. D. Peal, R.H.A. (A Bty. 1938)
Capt. W. J. Potter (B Bty. 1933)
Capt. W. G. Reader (F Bty. 1941)
Capt. F. C. K. Rowland (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. R. V. Seddon (B Bty. 1934)
Capt. G. J. S. Slinn, R.H.A. (A Bty. 1938)
Capt. E. M. Stevens, H.A.C., R.H.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. R. H. Stevens (att. *Parachute Regiment*) (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. V. B. Throndsen (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. J. K. Tobutt (A Bty. 1936)
Capt. J. P. Townend (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. D. Tweddle (A Bty. 1938)
Capt. W. J. Underhill (A.A. 1940)
Capt. R. C. Whorlow (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. K. B. McK. Wright (A Bty. 1935)
Lieut. L. D. Andrew (A.A. 1940)
Lieut. H. Bonsall (C Bty. 1940)
Lieut. D. V. J. Boys (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. T. P. Cokayne (H Bty. 1940)
Lieut. P. W. Crocker (D Bty. 1939)
Lieut. G. H. Evison (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. E. A. P. Forward (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. M. F. Fulcher (B Bty. 1936)
Lieut. T. H. Gates (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. A. F. Gray (A Bty. 1939)
Lieut. G. R. Horne (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. G. H. Johnson (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. R. Jutsum (A Bty. 1939)
Lieut. P. A. Keech, R.H.A. (2 Coy. 1936)
Lieut. J. Lefroy-Owen (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. F. F. Leroy (A.A. 1941)
Lieut. G. J. Macphee (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. J. C. May (A Bty. 1928)
Lieut. R. M. Monkhouse (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. J. L. Moore (A Bty. 1936)
Lieut. H. D. Mordle (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. J. R. Moritz (3 Coy. 1926; A.A. 1939)
Lieut. G. A. C. Newton (D Bty. 1939)
Lieut. B. L. Olley (D Bty. 1940)
Lieut. D. A. Pickup (B Bty. 1939)
Lieut. C. F. Robinson (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. C. J. Saunders (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. R. E. A. Stebbing (A Bty. 1936)
Lieut. J. O. Timms, R.H.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. R. H. F. Truman (A.A. 1940)
Lieut. W. C. O'D. Waddington (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. R. A. C. Webster (A Bty. 1936)
2/Lieut. G. B. Cocollis (1 Coy. 1923; A.A. 1939)
2/Lieut. G. Cook (A Bty. 1933)
2/Lieut. E. J. Dainty (B Bty. 1937)
2/Lieut. H. P. Davies (D Bty. 1939)
2/Lieut. A. H. Jones (A and D Bty. 1938)
2/Lieut. J. A. Macintosh (B Bty. 1939)
2/Lieut. F. B. Mitford, R.H.A. (B Bty. 1939)
2/Lieut. J. R. W. Monk (A Bty. 1937)
2/Lieut. S. M. Parker (B Bty. 1940)

2/Lieut. R. C. Pitt (C Bty. 1939)
2/Lieut. G. N. Symons (11 Regt. 1938)
2/Lieut. J. B. Timewell (A.A. 1940)
2/Lieut. D. E. Waterman (A Bty. 1935)
2/Lieut. J. G. Wynne (C Bty. 1939)
L/Bdr. F. D. Gifford, R.H.A. (D Bty. 1939)
L/Bdr. P. D. H. Pierson, R.H.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Gnr. J. N. Ingram (D Bty. 1939)
Gnr. G. G. Mackay (A.A. 1939)

Royal Engineers

Major T. C. Baillon (A.A. 1939)
Major R. C. Bingham (3 Coy. 1937)
Capt. J. B. Iceton (A.A. 1939)
2/Lieut. R. C. Allen (Cadet Bn. 1943)

Royal Corps of Signals

Capt. S. L. Blatch (A Bty. 1939)
Lieut. H. D. Jack (A Bty. 1939)

Irish Guards

Major A. R. Eardley-Wilmot (A.A. 1939)

Welsh Guards

Sergt. F. B. Eames (Armoury House Staff)

The Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey)

Major R. Elliott (A.A. 1939)
Major J. R. Walker (1 Coy. 1936)
Capt. D. S. S. Bullock (4 Coy. 1939)
Capt. E. R. C. Mayer (1 Coy. 1936)
Lieut. R. T. Shaw (2 Coy. 1937)
2/Lieut. H. M. C. Candy (4 Coy. 1936)
2/Lieut. O. Holmes (2 Coy. 1936)
2/Lieut. R. L. Hopkins (1 Coy. 1935)

The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment)

Lieut. N. J. Mander (1 Coy. 1931; A.A. 1939)

The King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster)

Capt. F. F. Winmill (att. *Chindits*) (4 Coy. 1937)
Lieut. R. J. T. Ewin (4 Coy. 1936)

The Royal Warwickshire Regiment

2/Lieut. M. A. Gammidge (1 Coy. 1938)
2/Lieut. D. E. Widmer (1 Coy. 1933)

The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment)

Capt. O. B. S. Gray (3 Coy. 1936)
Capt. E. G. Head (1 Coy. 1901; H.D. Coy. 1939)
Capt. F. G. Kahl (att. *Commandos*) (3 Coy. 1933)
Capt. (Q.M.) A. J. Lake, H.A.C. (H.Q. Coy. 1935)
Capt. J. C. Rhodes (A Bty. 1939)

The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment

Lieut. G. C. George (2 Coy. 1939)
2/Lieut. J. C. Burrell (1 Coy. 1936)
2/Lieut. H. L. Burridge (3 Coy. 1939)

The Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's)

Lieut. G. B. S. Wilson (1 Coy. 1936)

The East Yorkshire Regiment (The Duke of York's Own)

Major F. F. Robins (A.A. 1940)
Capt. G. D. Wood (1 Coy. 1937)

The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment

Capt. B. O. Kesby (3 Coy. 1936)
Lieut. D. H. Jackson (3 Coy. 1939)
2/Lieut. G. E. Robers-Medway (2 Coy. 1939)

The Royal Leicestershire Regiment

Lieut. J. M. Bonell (1 Coy. 1936)
2/Lieut. C. A. Botibol (1 Coy 1935)

The Green Howards (Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment)

2/Lieut. A. J. Capps (4 Coy. 1937)

The Lancashire Fusiliers

Capt. A. M. Doyle-Davidson (3 Coy. 1937)

The Royal Scots Fusiliers

Major C. T. Korts (3 Coy. 1926)
Capt. F. S. Ripper (3 Coy. 1926)
2/Lieut. H. A. F. F. McGrath (4 Coy. 1939)

The Royal Welch Fusiliers

Lieut. G. V. R. Davies (A.A. 1940)

The South Wales Borderers

Capt. D. M. Davidson (att. *Commandos*) (2 Coy. 1939)
Capt. W. R. Gwillim (2 Coy. 1938)
Lieut. D. A. Dutton (att. *Commandos*) (3 Coy. 1929)

The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)

Capt. N. R. Munn (A Bty. 1938)

The Gloucestershire Regiment

Capt. L. Leese (att. *Commandos*) (B Bty. 1936)

The East Surrey Regiment

Lieut. D. K. Smith (1 Coy. 1936)
2/Lieut. J. L. F. Williams (3 Coy. 1936)
L/Cpl. S. G. Turner (3 Coy. 1936)
Pte. G. L. Sharples (1 Coy. 1936)

The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry

Capt. A. Lehmann (A.A. 1940)
2/Lieut. M. E. Arnold (B Bty. 1934)

The Duke of Wellington's Regiment (West Riding)

Major P. P. Benson (4 Coy. 1923)
Lieut. E. P. Locatelli (4 Coy. 1939)

The Royal Sussex Regiment

Capt. D. W. Gaylard (3 Coy. 1933)
Lieut. L. C. Armstrong (att. *Sierra Leone Regt.*) (A.A. 1939)
2/Lieut. P. J. V. Nolan (Cadet Bn. 1942)
2/Lieut. E. P. Slowe (3 Coy. 1932)

The Royal Hampshire Regiment

Major E. C. Henley (2 Coy. 1933)
Capt. C. J. Cresswell (1 Coy. 1939)

The Dorsetshire Regiment

Major R. E. Harris (1 Coy. 1937)
2/Lieut. G. R. E. Follett (1 Coy. 1937)
2/Lieut. E. V. Ingram (A Bty. 1930)

The South Lancashire Regiment (The Prince of Wales's Volunteers)

2/Lieut. B. O. Warren (1 Coy. 1939)

The Welch Regiment

Lt.-Col. J. S. Morrison-Jones (4 Coy. 1936)
Capt. G. C. Williams (2 Coy. 1938)
2/Lieut. K. R. Mattey (H.D. 1940)

The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment)

Capt. C. S. Higgins (C Bty. 1939)

The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

Capt. E. A. Moy-Thomas (att. 1 *Airborne Divn.*) (A.A. 1939)

The Essex Regiment

Capt. B. J. Cornelius (A Bty. 1936)
2/Lieut A. J. Baines (3 Coy 1936)

The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regt.)

Major L. C. Hunter (2 Coy. 1931)

The Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire)

Major G. W. York (2 Coy. 1933)

The Northamptonshire Regiment

Capt. H. W. Morgan (B Bty. 1932)
Lieut. M. E. Handon (D Bty. 1939)
Lieut. D. P. Passmore (4 Coy. 1937)
Lieut. J. Perry (2 Coy. 1936)

The Royal Berkshire Regiment (Princess Charlotte of Wales's)

Capt. J. M. Bedford (3 Coy. 1932)
2/Lieut. M. H. Holme (4 Coy. 1939)

The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment

Major G. M. Dyas (1 Coy. 1931)
Capt. L. T. Mead (4 Coy. 1937)
Capt. P. M. Peerless (2 Coy. 1937)
2/Lieut. A. T. V. Pine (2 Coy. 1936)
Pte. B. A. W. Penn (3 Coy. 1933)

The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

Major W. G. Haughton, H.A.C. (3 Coy. 1925)

The King's Shropshire Light Infantry

Capt. J. L. Stride (att. *Worcs. Regt.*) (2 Coy. 1938)
2/Lieut. R. W. Morgan (2 Coy. 1939)

The Middlesex Regiment (Duke of Cambridge's Own)

Capt. J. R. Asling (2 Coy. 1936)
Capt. F. B. B. Buckbarrow (4 Coy. 1936)
Capt. D. West (4 Coy. 1925)
Lieut. C. Cheeswright (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. K. E. Young (2 Coy. 1931)
2/Lieut. K. D. Tarr (4 Coy. 1936)

The King's Royal Rifle Corps

Major F. de R. Dawson (att. *Queen's Own Yorkshire Dragoons*) (4 Coy. 1935)

The Wiltshire Regiment (Duke of Edinburgh's)

Capt. B. G. Widnell (3 Coy. 1928)
Lieut. W. E. Halse-Hearne (att. *Commandos*) (B Bty. 1938)

The Manchester Regiment

Major J. M. North (3 Coy. 1939)

The Durham Light Infantry

Major P. P. Kelly, H.A.C. (1 Coy. 1926)
Major F. S. Manford (1 Coy. 1939)
Lieut. D. R. Prince (4 Coy. 1938)
2/Lieut. G. H. Blakey (2 Coy. 1938)
2/Lieut. T. A. Graham (2 Coy. 1938)

The Seaforth Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs, The Duke of Albany's)

Lieut. H. F. S. Mackenzie (3 Coy. 1938)
2/Lieut. P. C. Fleming (4 Coy. 1935)

The Gordon Highlanders

Capt. P. D. Kebbell (att. *N. Rhodesia Regt.*) (2 Coy. 1939)

The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders

Capt. R. D. M. Emmerson (2 Coy. 1939)
Capt. J. B. J. Houghton (att. *Commandos*) (A.A. 1939) (*Taken prisoner, he escaped and was recaptured and shot.*)

The Royal Ulster Rifles

Capt. J. A. O'R. O'Flynn (2 Coy. 1936)
Lieut. R. Quinn (3 Coy. 1936)

The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princess Louise's)

Lieut. R. Carswell (B Bty. 1939)

Glider Pilot Regiment

Capt. N. G. Hardie (B Bty. 1936)

Parachute Regiment

Lieut. D. S. Catlin (3 Coy. 1936)

Royal Army Service Corps

Major K. A. W. Charnaud (1 Coy. 1930)
Capt. R. H. Carr (A Bty. 1927)
Capt. D. S. Haigh (3 Coy. 1938)
Capt. E. H. Notson (3 Coy. 1931)

Royal Army Medical Corps

Major R. Edwards (86 Regt. 1941)
Major R. A. Foucar (H.Q. Coy. 1931)

Royal Army Ordnance Corps

Major J. A. C. Barlow (273 Bty. 1939)
Lieut. C. C. Ingram (A.A. 1939)

Royal Army Pay Corps

Lieut. E. M. G. Cartledge (1 Coy. 1914)
Lieut. L. W. Plumb (B Bty. 1912)

General List

Major W. W. Burton (Inf. 1938)
Capt. E. R. Wakefield (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. S. J. Thomson (D Bty. 1939)

4/5 *Mahratta Light Infantry*

Major D. D. Higgins (3 Coy. 1933 ; A.A. 1939)

9 *Jat Regiment*

Lt.-Col. W. M. Morgan (3 Coy. 1914)

18 *Royal Garwhal Rifles*

Lieut. J. S. Hogan (3 Coy. 1936)

19 *Hyderabad Regiment*

Major A. D. Brown (1 Coy. 1918)

25 *Ajmer Regiment*

Capt. F. B. Chambers (A Bty. 1939)

Indian Ordnance Mechanical Engineers

Capt. F. D. Deakin (A.A. 1939)

The Lincoln and Welland Regiment (Canadian Army)

L/Cpl. T. M. Griffiths (2 Coy. 1926)

New Zealand Field Artillery

2/Lieut. J. P. Dill (A Bty. 1934)

Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps

Bdr. J. M. Houghton (2 Coy. 1927)
Pte. J. C. Eager (4 Coy. 1936)

Singapore Volunteer Corps

Pte. L. F. D. May (4 Coy. 1937)

Royal Air Force

Sq/Ldr. J. C. Betts (B Bty. 1933)
Sq/Ldr. R. L. J. Fitch (3 Coy. 1937)
Sq/Ldr. A. V. Gowers (H.Q. Coy. 1932)
Sq/Ldr. J. B. Parnall (3 Coy. 1923)
Sq/Ldr. P. J. E. Ritchie (H.Q. Coy. 1932)
Sq/Ldr. R. M. Sanders (A.A. 1939)
F/Lieut. A. R. Brown (2 Coy. 1935)
F/Lieut. F. G. H. Chalk (A.A. 1939)
F/Lieut. R. P. Garnett (B Bty. 1925)
F/Lieut. F. D. Holdsworth (C Bty. 1939)
F/Lieut. P. J. Lea (A Bty. 1939)
F/Lieut. E. R. Muller-Rowland (C Bty. 1939)
F/Lieut. P. E. Raw (1 Coy. 1938)
F/Lieut. N. M. Tucker (4 Coy. 1933)
F/Offr. P. U. M. Gordon-Crosby (A.A. 1939)
F/Offr. R. C. Greenlees (3 Coy. 1932)
F/Offr. C. A. Hobson (A Bty. 1938)
F/Offr. J. M. Vaughan (4 Coy. 1937)
P/Offr. E. W. Blackwell (A.A. 1939)
P/Offr. K. C. W. Cope (A Bty. 1937)
P/Offr. P. L. G. Davies (A Bty. 1940)
P/Offr. R. A. Duce (1 Coy. 1936)
P/Offr. G. C. R. Franks (3 Coy. 1925)
P/Offr. G. I. Jerdein (4 Coy. 1936)
P/Offr. T. S. Lewis (3 Coy 1936)
P/Offr. S. McHugh (3 Coy. 1937)
P/Offr. V. J. Norman (A Bty. 1938)
P/Offr. J. G. Perry (B Bty. 1936)
P/Offr. A. Petty (2 Coy. 1938)
P/Offr. A. Swainston (A Bty. 1933)
P/Offr. K. G. Webb (B Bty. 1936)
P/Offr. P. G. Wilson (2 Coy. 1936)
L.A.C. L. G. Washington (3 Coy. 1925)

Merchant Navy

2nd Radio Officer J. L. Price (4 Coy. 1939)

Home Guard

Lieut. E. F. Stanford (Lt.-Col. H.A.C.) (A Bty. 1909)
Pte. R. B. Hobson (A Bty. 1920)

Civil Defence

Air Raid Warden A. F. Ettlinger (4 Coy. 1909)

Appendix II

HONOURS AND AWARDS

(The ranks given here are those held at the time the decoration was earned)

(*k*) Killed in action.
(*dw*) Died of wounds.
(*d*) Killed or died on active service.

11 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT, R.H.A.

Distinguished Service Order

Lt.-Col. R. W. Goodbody
Lt.-Col. W. M. Leggatt
Lt.-Col. J. H. Slade-Powell
Major J. R. Richmond

Members of the Order of the British Empire

Capt. G. C. Tills
R.Q.M.S. J. Singleton

Bar to the Military Cross

Major D. Morris
Capt. R. N. Smith
Capt. J. W. Hopkins, (*k*) (*his M.C. was won in France* 1940)

Military Cross

Major G. R. Armstrong
Major J. P. Charles
Major F. B. S. Maclaren
Major E. C. Mansel
Major D. Morris
Major J. P. Sworder
Capt. K. E. Bolton
Capt. T. F. Butler-Stoney (*k*)
Capt. G. N. P. Chastel de Boinville
Capt. L. Q. Drage (*k*)
Capt. E. Dudley-Smith
Capt. J. D. Henderson
Capt. J. H. McAllum (*k*)
Capt. J. S. Martin, R.A.M.C.
Capt. J. M. Page
Capt. J. A. F. Sewell
Capt. R. N. Smith
Capt. D. Young
Lieut. J. P. Thomson-Glover

George Medal

Lieut. G. F. Moore
Gnr. J. Waters

Distinguished Conduct Medal

L/Sergt. C. B. Dornton-Duff
Gnr. D. B. Simpson

Military Medal

B.S.M. R. Hall
Sergt. S. F. Kirk
Sergt. G. T. A. Knight
Sergt. V. H. Quinney
Sergt. M. J. T. Town (*dw*)
L/Sergt. C. B. Dornton-Duff
L/Sergt. D. Tomlin
Bdr. P. Bennett
Bdr. W. J. R. Boardman (*k*)
Bdr. F. G. Gilbert
Bdr. H. R. Parry (*k*)
Bdr. R. S. Williams (*k*)
L/Bdr. H. D. Simmons
L/Cpl. J. M. Holder,
  Royal Corps of Signals
L/Cpl. J. McA. Morans,
  Royal Corps of Signals
Gnr. E. W. Robinson (*d*)
Gnr. S. R. Westwood

British Empire Medal

Sergt. W. J. Binney

Bronze Star (U.S.A.)

B.S.M. G. W. Flutter

Mentions in Despatches

12 Officers and 25 Warrant Officers and Other Ranks

Commendation Cards

4 Officers

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12 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT, R.H.A.

Distinguished Service Order

Lt.-Col. J. A. T. Barstow

Military Cross

Major J. Grose
Major D. E. Hughes
Major C. Middleton
Major S. N. Rae
Capt. H. N. Atherton
Capt. J. M. Austin-Smith
Capt. J. G. Bagnall
Capt. J. G. H. Banks
Capt. T. P. Cracknell
Capt. K. Hunt
Capt. J. S. Pirie
Lieut. A. D. A. Newbery

Distinguished Conduct Medal

Sergt. J. C. Lawrie (*k*)

Military Medal

B.S.M. F. J. Hunt
Sergt. T. B. Ainslie
Sergt. C. Farnsworth
Sergt. J. W. C. Hodkisson
L/Sergt. G. A. Ferrari
L/Bdr. H. Dickinson
L/Bdr. R. W. Griffin
L/Bdr. E. C. Howes
L/Bdr. R. H. Newell
Gnr. J. D. Kerr
Gnr. L. J. Peters
Gnr. S. G. Searle

Silver Star (U.S.A.)

Capt. T. P. Cracknell

Mentions in Despatches

12 Officers and 20 Warrant Officers and Other Ranks

Commendation Cards

1 Other Rank

13 (H.A.C.) REGIMENT, R.H.A.

BAR TO THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER

Lt.-Col. R. B. T. Daniell, D.S.O.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER

Major R. Gaunt

MILITARY CROSS

Major G. V. de C. O'Grady (The O'Grady)
Major G. W. Smyth-Osbourne
Capt. R. T. C. Addington
Capt. A. N. Bicket
Capt. G. D. H. Budgen (*k*)
Capt. H. G. S. Davidge
Capt. P. Kinnersley
Capt. A. N. Young
Lieut. E. Mather
B.S.M. E. A. Powdrill

MILITARY MEDAL

Sergt. R. M. L. Dunbar
Sergt. R. Duncan
L/Bdr. F. Buckley
Gnr. L. F. Adams (*k*)
Gnr. A. McD. Gillies
Gnr. A. Meylan
Gnr. A. Shaw
Gnr. R. Sutton
Gnr. N. Tait

CHEVALIER OF THE ORDER OF LEOPOLD II (BELGIUM), WITH PALM

Lt.-Col. R. B. T. Daniell

CHEVALIER OF THE ORDER OF LEOPOLD II (BELGIUM)

Capt. H. T. Fost

ORDER OF THE CROWN OF ITALY

Lt.-Col. H. R. L. Hodges

SILVER STAR (U.S.A.)

Capt. W. A. Taylor

CROIX DE GUERRE (FRANCE)

Major K. R. Farquhar

BRONZE CROSS (NETHERLANDS)

Lieut. P. de F. Delaforce

CROIX DE GUERRE 1940-1945 (BELGIUM)

Lt.-Col. R. B. T. Daniell
Lt.-Col. H. R. L. Hodges
Capt. H. T. Fost
Gnr. P. W. Foster

MENTIONS IN DESPATCHES

14 Officers and 10 Warrant Officers and Other Ranks

COMMENDATION CARDS

Officer and 12 Warrant Officers and Other Ranks

86 (H.A.C.) H.A.A. REGIMENT, R.A.

Officer of the Order of the British Empire

Lt.-Col. G. H. Champness

Member of the Order of the British Empire

Major E. R. G. Heath
Major C. Robinson
The Rev. J. C. T. Downes, R.A.CH.D.
B.S.M. W. R. Newman

British Empire Medal

B.S.M. J. R. Martin
B.S.M. R. C. Richardson

Bronze Star (U.S.A.)

Sergt. C. W. Britton
Sergt. H. T. W. Manning
L/Bdr. E. N. H. Oldrey

Chevalier of the Order of Leopold II (Belgium)

Lt.-Col. G. H. Champness
Capt. R. E. Stevens

Croix de Guerre 1940-1945 (Belgium), with Palm

Lt.-Col. G. H. Champness
Capt. R. E. Stevens

Croix de Guerre 1940-1945 (Belgium)

B.Q.M.S. G. W. M. Davies
L/Bdr. R. S. Oatway
L/Cpl. D. G. Y. Payne, R.E.M.E.

Decoration Militaire (Belgium) Second Class

B.S.M. J. Hanks
Sergt. W. Barclay
Bdr. F. Astridge

Mentions in Despatches

12 Officers and 2 Warrant Officers and Other Ranks

275 (H.A.C.) H.A.A. BATTERY, R.A.

Member of the Order of the British Empire

Capt. A. M. F. Williams

Military Cross

Lieut. H. C. O'Neill

Military Medal

Sergt. T. W. Rose

H.A.C. COMPANIES, 13 BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS

Officer of the Order of the British Empire

Lt.-Col. J. Bamford Smith

Member of the Order of the British Empire

Cpl. F. A. P. Wright (*k*)

METROPOLITAN SPECIAL CONSTABULARY (H.A.C. DIVISION)

British Empire Medal

H. I. G. Pothecary

HONOURS AWARDED TO MEMBERS OF THE COMPANY WHILE SERVING WITH OTHER UNITS

Victoria Cross

Major R. H. Cain, The South Staffordshire Regiment (Airborne) (2 Coy. 1928)

George Cross

Major B. S. T. Archer, Royal Engineers (4 Coy. 1939)

Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath

Lt.-General R. N. O'Connor (1 Coy. 1917)

Companion of the Order of the Bath

Major-General R. Evans (1 Coy. 1907)
Major-General J. A. Sinclair (Arty. Adjt. 1929)
Col. the Earl Fortescue (Col. Comdt. 1935-41)

Commander of the Order of the British Empire (Military Division)

Brig. W. A. Ebbels, late Royal Artillery (11 Regt. 1940)
Brig. A. I. Irons, late Royal Pioneer Corps (H.D. 1940)
Brig. F. L. McNaughton, late R.A. (Arty. Adjt. 1920)
Brig. W. G. H. Pike, late R.A. (12 Regt. 1941)
Brig. W. A. Sheil (*k*), late R.A. (B Bty. 1941)
Brig. T. Smith, late R.A. (B Bty. 1922)
Brig. T. C. Usher, late R.A. (C Bty. 1941)
Col. A. R. Rees-Reynolds, The Queen's Royal Regiment (1 Coy. 1931; 274 Bty. 1939)
G/Capt. H. E. Hills, Royal Air Force (3 Coy. 1914)

Commander of the Order of the British Empire (Civil Division)

F. W. Brundle, Esq., C.C., City of London Air Defence Committee (Siege Bty. 1917)
K. G. J. Headington, Esq. (A Bty. 1917)
Capt. H. H. Payne (A Bty. 1914)

BAR TO THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER

Lt.-Col. W. A. Sheil (*k*), R.A. (B Bty. 1941)
Lt.-Col. T. C. Usher, R.A. (C Bty. 1941)

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER

Brig. H. C. Phipps, late R.A. (13 Regt. 1943)
Brig. W. G. H. Pike, late R.A. (12 Regt. 1941)
Lt.-Col. G. R. Armstrong, H.A.C., R.H.A., att. R.A. (A Bty. 1930)
Lt.-Col. J. R. E. Benson, R.A. (B Bty. 1941)
Lt.-Col. A. J. C. Block, R.A. (12 Regt. 1943)
Lt.-Col. C. G. Buttenshaw, R.A. (12 Regt. 1944)
Lt.-Col. R. D. Judd, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. A. D. McKechnie, H.A.C. Inf., att. The Buffs (3 Coy. 1925)
Lt.-Col. J. H. Mason, The Queen's R. Regt. (B Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. W. A. Sheil (*k*), R.A. (B Bty. 1941)
Lt.-Col. T. C. Usher, R.A. (C Bty. 1941)
Lt.-Col. W. A. C. Wilkinson, R.A. (A Bty. 1914 ; Inf. Adjt. 1924)
Lt.-Col. B. Wilson, R.A. (Arty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. J. F. Young, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major D. A. Beckett, Essex Regt. (1 Coy. 1939)
Major J. E. F. Linton, R.A. (B Bty. 1940)
Major D. V. Mackay, R.A. (B Bty. 1936)
Major R. S. Paterson, Skinner's Horse (A Bty. 1931)
Major P. Pettit, H.A.C., R.H.A., att. R.A. (B Bty. 1926)
Capt. P. B. Watson, Green Howards (3 Coy. 1938)
Lieut. D. R. Schofield, R. Fus. (H.Q. Coy. 1937)

OFFICER OF THE ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Brig. P. J. E. Clapham, late R.A. (O.C.T.U. 1943)
Brig. J. V. D. Radford, late R.A. (11 Regt. 1941)
Brig. J. G. S. Ross, late R.A. (86 Regt. 1940)
Col. V. E. Scott Bailey, late Intell. Corps (A Bty. 1920)
Col. J. H. Bentley, late R.P.C. (274 Bty. 1939)
Col. the Earl Fortescue (Col. Comdt. 1935-41)
Col. P. R. Hill, R.A.O.C. (C.A.S.R.) (274 Bty. 1939)
Col. J. H. Mote, Gen. List (4 Coy. 1917)
Col. A. B. Phillpotts, R.A. (274 Bty. 1939)
Col. E. D. R. Shearer, late R.A. (2 Coy. 1929)
Lt.-Col. R. P. W. Adeane, H.A.C., H.A.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. C. R. Barham, E. Surreys (4 Coy. 1926)
Lt.-Col. P. F. Benton-Jones, late R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. P. R. E. Browne, H.A.C. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. R. Chalkley, R.A.O.C. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. D. C. M. Collins, R.A. (1 Coy. and 275 Bty. 1924)
Lt.-Col. F. S. R. Foster, R.A.O.C. (A and 273 Bty. 1932)
Lt.-Col. R. J. Freeman, R.M. (A Bty. 1925)
Lt.-Col. J. E. C. Fryett, R.A. (B Bty. 1928)
Lt.-Col. M. Gilford, Buffs (O.C.T.U. 1942)
Lt.-Col. C. M. Goodall, W. Riding H.G. (4 Coy. 1910)
Lt.-Col. J. A. C. Greenwood, 11 Sikhs (3 Coy. 1932)
Lt.-Col. J. E. M. Gunning, J.A.G.'s Dept. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. J. L. Hayden, Intell. Corps (A Bty. 1921)
Lt.-Col. P. R. Hill, R.A.O.C. (274 Bty. 1939)

Wing Cdr. H. E. Hills, R.A.F. (3 Coy. 1914)
Lt.-Col. P. Hodder-Williams, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. A. T. Holman, Cornwall H.G. (B Bty. 1914)
Lt.-Col. H. O. Hughes, R.H.K.D.F. (A Bty. 1921)
Lt.-Col. J. C. Laing, E. Yorks (3 Coy. 1939)
Lt.-Col. A. O. Maclean, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. R.A. (B Bty. 1931)
Wing. Cdr. W. R. A. Matheson, R.A.F. (2 Coy. 1926)
Lt.-Col. C. Mendelssohn, R.A. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. A. Mills, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. R.A. (A Bty. 1922)
Lt.-Col. F. Mills, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. R.A. (A Bty. 1914)
Lt.-Col. G. E. B. Mount, R.A. (A Bty. 1925)
Lt.-Col. C. Nettleship, R. Sigs. (1 Coy. 1927)
Lt.-Col. S. E. Reynolds, R.P.C. (274 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. E. J. Riseley, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. R.A. (1 Coy. 1925)
Lt.-Col. G. H. Rulf, R.A.S.C. (H.D. 1940)
Lt.-Col. J. F. Shearer, R. Sigs. (275 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. J. A. Sinclair, R.A. (Adjt. 1929)
Lt.-Col. R. W. Smith, R.P.C. (274 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. J. A. Tallent, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. S. S. Tegner, R.A.O.C. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. H. G. Virtue, H.A.C. Inf. (R. of O.), att. R. Fus. (1 Coy. 1923)
Lt.-Col. A. A. Walter, Indian Army (2 Coy. 1918)
Lt.-Col. R. Ogier Ward, R.A.M.C. (B Bty. 1908)
Lt.-Col. G. D. Wreford-Brown, R. Berks (2 Coy. 1924)
Lt.-Col. H. A. Wynne, R. Fus. (1 Coy. 1925)
Major G. E. Bowman, R.A.S.C. (1 Coy. 1914)
Major A. W. Cowper, W. Yorks (2 Coy. 1938)
Major R. C. Laming, Ghurkas (A Bty. 1923)
Major A. W. Richards, London H.G. (1 Coy. 1915)
Capt. W. T. Bond (A Bty. 1914)
L. A. Frenken (A Bty. 1935)
G. E. Gilbey (Field Bty. 1886) (Civil Division)

Member of the Order of the British Empire

Col. E. H. Caswell, late R.P.C. (B Bty. 1933)
Lt.-Col. A. K. Brown, R.A.O.C. (1 Coy. 1924, 273 Bty.)
Lt.-Col. D. W. Brown, R. Fus. (1 Coy. 1936)
Lt.-Col. C. G. Buttenshaw, R.A. (12 Regt. 1944)
Lt.-Col. J. B. Griffiths, R.P.C. (274 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. E. H. E. Lydall, The Queen's Bays (11 Regt. 1940)
Lt.-Col. H. J. Sandle, R.A.O.C. (1 Coy. 1920 and 273 Bty.)
Lt.-Col. H. N. Whitehead, General List (B Bty. 1921)
Lt.-Col. F. D. Williamson, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. Staff (273 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. J. Carreras, R.A. (273 Bty. 1939)
Major C. J. F. Abbott, The Manchester Regt. (2 Coy. 1914)
Major J. E. Anderson, H.A.C. Inf., att. Staff (1 Coy. 1933)
Major R. J. Attenborough, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major T. C. Baillon (*k*), R.E. (A.A. 1939)
Major C. F. J. Barker, Wilts Regt. (1 Coy. 1936)
Major A. D. Baxter, R.P.C. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major J. M. Beecham, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Major F. R. G. Bell, R.A. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major W. H. Bennett, R. Fus. (1 Coy. 1936)
Major T. W. Bonser, R. Fus. (1 Coy. 1934)

Major E. Bowden, R.P.C. (B Bty. 1925)
Major A. F. Brown, R.A.S.C. (C Bty. 1940)
Major L. W. Burtt, R.A. (B Bty. 1935)
Major G. Carew-Jones, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Major E. Cawkell, Essex H.G. (4 Coy. 1914)
Major M. A. Chamberlain, Lincolnshire Regt. (3 Coy. 1939)
Major J. G. W. Charnaud, R. Fus. (1 Coy. 1933)
Major P. L. G. Child, Border Regt. (1 Coy. 1939)
Major L. Chrimes, R.A. (A Bty. 1943)
Major D. W. A. Clare, R. Welch Fus. (4 Coy. 1936)
Major E. P. Clarke, R.A. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major D. Clitherow-Smith, Q.O.R.W. Kent Regt. (A Bty. 1930; 275 Bty.)
Major M. Y. Cobb, R.A. (3 Coy. 1938)
Major R. H. Coleman, R.P.C. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major L. C. Downing, R.A. (273 Bty. 1939)
Major J. R. E. Droogleever, R.A. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major M. D. Dudley, R. Sigs. (11 Regt. 1941)
Major K. W. Evetts, R.E. (B Bty. 1928)
Major E. G. C. Flawn, R.A. (A Bty. 1927; 275 Bty.)
Major R. H. Foster, R.A. (A Bty. 1937)
Major F. I. Geddes, R.E. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major J. T. Griffiths, R. Deccan Horse (A Bty. 1939)
Major N. L. Hall, Lancs. Fus. (1 Coy. 1936)
Major J. W. Hambly, R.A. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major G. W. Henderson, R.A.S.C. (1 Coy. 1932)
Major J. C. S. Hester, R. Sigs. (A.A. 1939)
Major D. A. Hewat, Lancs. Fus. (1 Coy. 1939)
Major P. Hodder-Williams, H.A.C., H.A.A., att. R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major F. D. Hollick, Intell. Corps (B Bty. 1939)
Major E. W. Horley, Indian Army (3 Coy. 1934)
Major H. F. A. Jackson, H.A.C. Inf., att. Sherwoods (4 and 1 Coy. 1925)
Major C. F. Jacottet, Surrey H.G. (2 Coy. 1914)
Major C. R. Janvrin, The R. Berks. Regt. (1 Coy. 1920)
Major H. D. Jay, R.A.S.C. (3 Coy. 1929)
Major F. C. Journet, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major D. G. Lewis, R.A. (A.A. 1941)
Major E. L. G. McManus, R.P.C. (H.D. 1940)
Major R. T. M. McPhail, R.A. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major P. G. E. Michaelis, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major W. R. Middleton, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major R. Moodie, R.E. (1 Coy. 1933)
Major K. F. Morrill, Lancs. Fus. (11 Regt. 1933)
Major E. A. Mounsey, R.A.S.C. (A Bty. 1926)
Major R. E. K. Norwood, R.E.M.E. (11 Regt. 1941)
Major T. W. F. Odell, R.A.S.C. (1 Coy. 1936; 275 Bty.)
Major T. W. Peters, Shropshire Light Infantry (1 Coy. 1939)
Major T. F. Poole, R.A. (1 Coy. 1932)
Major W. F. Poole, R.A.S.C. (1 Coy. 1932)
Major A. G. Robertson, E. Lancs. Regt. (273 Bty. 1939)
Major S. C. Selwyn, Army Catering Corps (274 Bty. 1939)
Major G. C. B. Shaddick, R.E. (B Bty. 1927)
Major H. M. Shellard, R.A.S.C. (3 Coy. 1931)
Major G. B. Smith, A.C.C. (A Bty. 1939)
Major W. R. L. Smith, R.A.S.C. (A Bty. 1913)

Major J. L. Spicer, Intell. Corps (1 Coy. 1925 and 274 Bty.)
Major J. H. Thomson, Rifle Bde. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major Sir Geoffrey Tritton, BART., R.B. (A.A. 1939)
Major K. L. Walmesley, R.A. (D Bty. 1936)
Major P. L. Warren, R.A. (2 Coy. 1934)
Major T. A. Wilson, R. Tank Regt. (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. D. S. Blades, S. African Forces (1 Coy. 1925)
Capt. N. Brownlow, R. Scots (273 Bty. 1939)
Capt. C. R. Cook, R.P.C. (4 Coy. 1925 and 274 Bty.)
Capt. N. F. Daniel, R.A. (273 Bty. 1940)
Capt. A. E. Keech, London H.G. (3 Coy. 1914)
Capt. J. E. M. Maw, H.A.C., R.H.A. (R. of O.), att. R.P.C. (A Bty. 1914)
Capt. D. T. H. Nicholson, Border Regt. (4 Coy. 1939)
Capt. H. G. Oldman, H.A.C., R.H.A., att. R.A. (B Bty. 1935)
Capt. D. J. Owen, R. Sigs. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. F. J. Pinchen, R.A.S.C. (H Bty. 1940)
Capt. G. Power, R.A. (A.A. 1939)
Capt. I. S. Price, Gordon Hrs. (4 Coy. 1936)
Capt. J. L. Reed, R.A. (273 Bty. 1939)
F/Lieut. L. L. Hunt, R.A.F. (4 Coy. 1934)
Lieut. L. A. Rowe, R.P.C. (E Bty. 1940)
2/Lieut. R. H. B. Lord, R.E. (4 Coy. 1937)
2/Lieut. J. E. Radford, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
C.S.M. D. W. Abraham, R. Fus. (3 Coy. 1922)
S. R. Atwill (A Bty. 1907) (Civil Division)

Distinguished Service Cross

Lieut.-Comdr. A. J. B. Forde, R.N. (3 Coy. 1935)
Lieut.-Comdr. H. V. Gordon, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (B Bty. 1930)
Lieut. A. H. Maccoy, S. African Naval Forces (A Bty. 1934)

Bar to The Military Cross

Capt. H. G. McFall, R.H.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. G. J. S. Slinn (*k*), S. Notts. Hussars, R.H.A. (A Bty. 1938)

Military Cross

Lt.-Col. B. J. Brennan, Cameronians (1 Coy. 1938)
Lt.-Col. P. K. Cross, J.A.G.'s Dept. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. J. M. Davies (*k*), R.A. (1 Coy. 1920)
Major A. S. Allberry, K.O.Y.L.I. (4 Coy. 1939)
Major B. L. Barber, H.A.C. Inf., att. S. Staffs. (2 Coy. 1932)
Major P. Barnett, R. Tank Regt. (1 Coy. 1935)
Major P. P. Benson (*k*), Duke of Wellington's Regt. (4 Coy. 1923)
Major P. B. Bishop, R.H.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major T. M. Brewis, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Major W. K. Carson, R.A. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major R. M. Clarke, R.A. (C Bty. 1940)
Major G. A. K. Collins, R.A. (273 Bty. 1939)
Major P. S. Crane, R.A. (4 Coy. 1936)
Major J. S. Cunis, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Major G. F. Doggett, King's Shropshire L.I. (275 Bty. 1940)
Major E. N. Dominy, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)

Major H. J. Drury, H.A.C. Inf. (R. of O.), att. K.O.Y.L.I. (1 Coy. 1925)
Major R. H. W. Dunn, R.A. (A Bty. 1941)
Major A. R. Eardley-Wilmot (*k*), Irish Guards (A.A. 1939)
Major A. T. Elsom, 8 Punjab Regt. (1 Coy. 1937)
Major R. Fox, R.A. (274 Bty. 1939)
Major J. L. Gebhard, The R. Warwickshire Regt. (1 Coy. 1939)
Major D. B. Girling, R.A. (B Bty. 1922)
Major A. E. Greenhill, R.A. (A.A. 1939)
Major B. E. Gwyn, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Major H. W. P. Harrison, R. Scots Fus. (3 Coy. 1927)
Major P. Hazell (*k*), R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Major R. S. W. Higgens, R.A. (A Bty. 1934)
Major H. J. Jourdain, The R. Sussex Regt. (4 Coy. 1934)
Major R. D. Judd, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Major N. L. Kind, 3 Gurkha Rif. (2 Coy. 1929)
Major D. G. Lahey-Bean, Manchester Regt. (2 Coy. 1936)
Major J. Lapthorn, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major D. O. Liddell, Cameronians (1 Coy. 1939)
Major A. G. P. Lincoln, H.A.C., R.H.A., att. Ayrshire Yeomanry R.A. (A and C Bty. 1937)
Major W. A. Livings, R.E. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major M. L. Macdona, R.A. (274 Bty. 1940)
Major J. S. Morrison-Jones (*k*), The Welch Regt. (4 Coy. 1936)
Major D. Neill, H.A.C. Inf., att. Reconnaissance Corps (3 Coy. 1929)
Major G. W. Nosotti, Green Howards (D Bty. 1940)
Major P. E. Pettit, H.A.C., R.H.A., att. Yeomanry R.A. (B Bty. 1931)
Major V. E. Price, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Major K. Richmond, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major D. L. V. Rowe, R.A. (B Bty. 1929)
Major W. A. Russell, R. Scots (2 Coy. 1938)
Major E. G. Scammell, R.A. (A Bty. 1937)
Major N. S. Shields, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Major H. J. T. Sills, D. of Wellington's Regt. (4 Coy. 1925)
Major E. F. Thompson, Middlesex Regt. (2 Coy. 1936)
Major W. D. Tighe-Wood, R. Ulster Rif. (2 Coy. 1930)
Major G. C. Wells, R.A. (B Bty. 1934)
Major H. N. Whitmee, R.A. (B Bty. 1925)
Major G. H. Wilford, H.A.C. Inf. (R. of O.), att. K.O.Y.L.I. (4 Coy. 1922)
Major J. E. H. Wise, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. J. Anderson, R.A. (A.A. 1939)
Capt. M. A. Ashton, R. Norfolk Regt. (1 Coy. 1939)
Capt. M. C. Bailey, R.A. (11 Regt. 1939)
Capt. R. A. Baker, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. G. Ball, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. R. L. Banks, R.A. (F Bty. 1941)
Capt. D. H. E. Barber, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. J. A. C. Baxter, R.H.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. L. Benké, R.H.A. (A Bty. 1938)
Capt. H. P. N. Benson, S. Staffs. Regt. (2 Coy. 1939)
Capt. H. A. P. Blamey, R.A. (B Bty. 1927)
Capt. B. G. Bonallack, R.A. (B Bty. 1930)
Capt. M. G. Bond, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. I. L. Buck, R.A. (B Bty. 1933)

Capt. I. F. Carpenter, R.A. (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. R. E. Cartwright, R.A. (12 Regt. 1940)
Capt. M. W. Catesby, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. G. Clark, Wilts Regt. (1 Coy. 1934)
Capt. J. A. Connell, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. L. Corbett-Price, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. P. N. Cross-Brown, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. M. Davidson (*dw*), S. Wales Borderers, att. Commandos (2 Coy. 1939)
Capt. T. B. Davis, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. G. S. de Jonge (*k*), R.H.A. (B Bty. 1936)
Capt. D. Dottridge, R. Fus. (3 Coy. 1933)
Capt. V. Dover, Parachute Regt. (1 Coy. 1937)
Capt. G. M. Dyas (*k*), Q.O.R.W. Kent Regt. (1 Coy. 1931)
Capt. D. F. Easten, Q.O.R.W. Kent Regt. (4 Coy. 1938)
Capt. J. N. Fraser, 2 Gurkha Rif. (A Bty. 1922)
Capt. W. M. Frost, The Queen's R. Regt. (A Bty. 1933)
Capt. S. L. G. Garland, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. P. S. Y. Garrett (*k*), R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. W. Gaylard (*k*), The R. Sussex Regt. (3 Coy. 1933)
Capt. W. E. H. Grayburn, R.A. (1 Coy. 1933)
Capt. G. C. A. Greenwood, R.A. (3 Coy. 1936)
Capt. A. K. Guest, R. Hampshire Regt. (3 Coy. 1931)
Capt. T. P. Halford-Thompson, R.A. (A Bty. 1929)
Capt. R. W. Harden, 27 Lancers (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. S. Harley, Seaforth Hrs. of Canada (A Bty. 1928)
Capt. W. G. Harris, R.H.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. C. H. Harrison, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. A. C. Hobson, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. F. R. Holdsworth, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. R. Holley, R.A. (D Bty. 1940)
Capt. J. B. J. Houghton (*k*), Cameron Hrs., att. Commandos (A.A. 1939)
Capt. R. D. Hunter, King's Own Regt. (2 Coy. 1939)
Capt. C. H. Jackson, H.A.C. Inf. (R. of O.), att. The R. Sussex Regt. (3 Coy. 1923)
Capt. D. W. Jones, S. Lancashire Regt. (A.A. 1940)
Capt. F. P. Keysell, R.A. (A Bty. 1937)
Capt. G. W. Lloyd (*k*), R.A. (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. J. S. Loram (*k*), R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. A. Low, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. P. V. Lowe, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. H. G. McFall, R.H.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. B. R. Marsh, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. J. G. Miller, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. E. E. Newbald, Q.O.R.W. Kent Regt. (3 Coy. 1935)
Capt. J. F. B. O'Shea, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. J. F. Pearcy, Recce. Corps (2 Coy. 1939)
Capt. K. A. Preston, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Capt. F. F. Robins (*k*), E. Yorkshire Regt. (A.A. 1940)
Capt. F. R. Salinger, R.A. (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. R. C. Seed, Warwickshire Yeo., R.A.C. (11 Regt. 1940)
Capt. G. F. Senior, R.A. (A.A. 1940)
Capt. H. N. D. Seymour, London Irish Rif. (1 Coy. 1934)

Capt. G. H. Shingleton, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. G. J. S. Slinn (*k*), S. Notts. Hrs. R.H.A. (A Bty. 1938)
Capt. W. O. Smedley, R.A. (273 Bty. 1939)
Capt. H. J. Stockings, E. Lancs. Regt. (1 Coy. 1936)
Capt. D. E. Tacey, R.H.A. (A Bty. 1934)
Capt. J. B. Talbot, R.A. (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. D. C. Turquand, 23 Hussars (A Bty. 1939)
Capt. R. D. Tyler, J. T. Tyson, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. B. H. Valentine, Q.O.R.W. Kent Regt. (275 Bty. 1939)
Capt. C. L. Warnock, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Capt. F. H. Waters, Hampshire Regt. (3 Coy. 1938)
Capt. R. V. B. Webb, R.A. (B Bty. 1931)
Capt. B. G. Widnell (*k*), Wilts Regt. (3 Coy. 1928)
Capt. E. J. V. Williams, R.H.A. (B Bty. 1935 and 12 Regt.)
Capt. D. V. Young, York and Lancaster Regt. (2 Coy. 1938)
Capt. H. J. Young, Essex Regt. (3 Coy. 1932)
Lieut. L. D. Andrew (*dw*), R.A. (A.A. 1940)
Lieut. K. A. Attiwell, R.A. (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. D. Beck, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Lieut. R. C. E. Cox, R.A. (B Bty. 1936)
Lieut. L. B. Farmiloe, R.A. (A.A. 1940)
Lieut. R. E. Hampton, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Lieut. A. F. Holland, 18 R. Garhwal Rif. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lieut. M. M. Johnstone, Derbyshire Yeo., R.A.C. (A Bty. 1939)
Lieut. E. M. Kilbane, 5 R. Inniskilling D.G. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lieut. W. O. Lane, R.A. (D Bty. 1940)
Lieut. J. C. S. Lepine, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Lieut. I. K. McEachran, R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Lieut. A. G. Molison, E. African Artillery (A Bty. 1928)
Lieut. R. A. Morrison, Black Watch (A.A. 1940)
Lieut. F. G. H. Murcutt, R.E. (275 Bty. 1939)
Lieut. D. M. Murray, 2 Punjab Regt. (4 Coy. 1933)
Lieut. F. Rowland, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)
Lieut. A. E. W. Rumsey, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. P. L. Russell, R.A. (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. The Hon. O. P. St. Aubyn, Army Air Corps (A Bty. 1939)
Lieut. G. A. Scaramanga, The King's Shropshire L. Inf., att. Commandos (1 Coy. 1938)
Lieut. R. R. Seel, H.A.C., R.H.A., att. R.H.A. (A Bty. 1931)
Lieut. D. T. Smith, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. R. A. P. Temple, K.R.R.C. (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. C. G. Toppin, R.A. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lieut. G. E. Townley, Recce. Corps (275 Bty. 1939)
Lieut. J. B. Tyler, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)
Lieut. J. G. Tyrell (*k*), Staffordshire Yeo., R.A.C. (C Bty. 1939)
Lieut. P. M. Wand-Tetley, Wilts Regt. (A.A. 1939)
Lieut. O. M. Wentworth-Stanley, 11 Hussars (A Bty. 1939)
Lieut. P. C. Winton, Gordon Hrs. (3 Coy. 1936)
2/Lieut. C. J. L. Bennett, R.A. (A Bty. 1938)
2/Lieut. R. A. J. Cheffins, Middlesex Regt. (2 Coy. 1935)
2/Lieut. D. W. Jones-Williams, 10 R. Hussars (D Bty. 1940)
2/Lieut. R. H. B. Lord, K.O.Y.L.I. (4 Coy. 1937)

BAR TO THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

Capt. C. C. Ballyn (*dw*), R.A. (Air O.P.)
Capt. W. S. Molison (*dw*), R.A. (Air O.P.)

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

R.A.F. (*unless otherwise stated*)

Sq/Ldr. J. S. Adams (C Bty. 1933)
Sq/Ldr. R. L. J. Fitch (*d*) (3 Coy. 1937)
Sq/Ldr. A. V. Gowers (*k*) (H.Q. Coy. 1932)
Sq/Ldr. P. C. Joel (1 Coy. 1933)
Sq/Ldr. R. W. Quixley (1 Coy. 1937)
Sq/Ldr. P. J. E. Ritchie (*k*) (H.Q. Coy. 1932)
F/Lieut. H. F. Burditt (A Bty. 1938)
F/Lieut. B. G. Carr (C Bty. 1939)
F/Lieut. F. G. H. Chalk (*k*) (A.A. 1939)
F/Lieut. R. M. Curtis (B Bty. 1934)
F/Lieut. W. D. S. Jackson (274 Bty. 1940)
F/Lieut. R. E. Knight (3 Coy. 1939)
F/Lieut. P. O. Miles (A Bty. 1937)
F/Lieut. P. E. Raw (*k*) (1 Coy. 1938)
Capt. C. C. Ballyn (*dw*), R.A. (Air O.P.) (A Bty. 1936)
Capt. N. H. Chase, R.A. (Air O.P.) (C Bty. 1939)
Capt. C. F. Huttenbach, R.A. (Air O.P.) (B Bty. 1938)
Capt. W. S. Molison (*dw*), R.A. (Air O.P.) (B Bty. 1933)
Capt. H. C. Salter, R.A. (Air O.P.) (B Bty. 1939)
Capt. J. P. Stunt, R.A. (Air O.P.) (C Bty. 1939)
F/Offr. L. L. Hunt (4 Coy. 1934)

AIR FORCE CROSS

F/Lieut. J. R. Butler, R.A.F. (1 Coy. 1932)

GEORGE MEDAL

Lt.-Col. W. A. C. Wilkinson, R.A. (A Bty. 1914; Inf. Adjt. 1924)
Major R. Chalkley, R.A.O.C. (273 Bty. 1939)
Capt. J. C. Nightingale, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL

C.P.O. S. W. Snelling (*k*), R.N. (Armoury House Staff)

DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL

Sergt. B. W. Ogden Smith, H.A.C. Inf., att. Commandos

MILITARY MEDAL

Sergt. B. W. Ogden Smith, H.A.C. Inf., att. Commandos

AIR FORCE MEDAL

S/Sergt. D. A. Hall, Glider Pilot Regiment (A.A. 1941)

LEGION OF MERIT (U.S.A.) DEGREE OF OFFICER

Col. V. E. Scott Bailey, Intell. Corps. (A Bty. 1920)
Lt.-Col. E. G. Rooney, R.A. (273 Bty. 1939)
Lt.-Col. T. Lubin-Silverston, R.A. (A and 275 Bty.)

SILVER STAR (U.S.A.)

Lt.-Col. J. Harington, R.A. (F Bty. 1941)

WAR DEPARTMENT BRONZE STAR (U.S.A.)

Lt.-Col. J. E. C. Fryett, R.A. (B Bty. 1928)
Lt.-Col. E. H. E. Lydall, The Queen's Bays (11 Regt. 1940)
Lieut. E. P. K. Willett, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Major C. H. Harmer, Intell. Corps (275 Bty. 1939)
Major Sir Geoffrey Tritton, BART., R.B. (A.A. 1939)
Capt. A. Speed-Andrews, K.O.Y.L.I. (2 Coy. 1936)

CHEVALIER OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR (FRANCE)

Brig. J. G. S. Ross, late R.A. (86 Regt. 1940)

CROIX DE GUERRE (FRANCE), WITH PALM

Brig. J. G. S. Ross, late R.A. (86 Regt. 1940)
Lt.-Col. E. J. Riseley, H.A.C., att. R.A. (1 Coy. 1925)
Capt. F. C. K. Rowland (*k*), R.A. (A Bty. 1939)

CROIX DE GUERRE (FRANCE)

Major G. C. Wells, R.A. (B Bty. 1934)
Capt. E. P. D. Cavendish, Royal Canadian Artillery (B Bty. 1929 and 274 Bty.)

COMMANDER OF THE ORDER OF LEOPOLD II (BELGIUM)

Brig. J. G. S. Ross, late R.A. (86 Regt. 1940)

CHEVALIER OF THE ORDER OF LEOPOLD II (BELGIUM), WITH PALM

Brig. J. G. S. Ross, late R.A. (86 Regt. 1940)
Lt.-Col. L. Chrimes, R.A. (A Bty. 1943)
Lt.-Col. J. F. Young, H.A.C., att R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major R. H. Forsyth, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Major J. R. Turner, Manchester Regt. (2 Coy. 1939)
Major G. R. A. Wixley, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)

CROIX DE GUERRE 1940-1945 (BELGIUM)

Brig. J. G. S. Ross, late R.A. (86 Regt. 1940)
Lt.-Col. L. Chrimes, R.A. (A Bty. 1943)
Lt.-Col. J. F. Young, H.A.C., att. R.A. (275 Bty. 1939)
Major R. H. Forsyth, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)
Major J. R. Turner, Manchester Regt. (2 Coy. 1939)
Major G. R. A. Wixley, R.A. (B Bty. 1939)

ORDER OF ORANGE NASSAU (NETHERLANDS)

Major E. L. C. Harding, D.C.L.I. (4 Coy. 1936)
Capt. A. G. L. Roberts, K. Shropshire L.I., att. Commandos (1 Coy. 1937)

BRONZE LION (NETHERLANDS)

Major R. L. Masters, R.A. (C Bty. 1939)

BRONZE CROSS (NETHERLANDS)

Major I. H. McKechnie, R.A. (3 Coy. 1926 and 273 Bty.)

HAAKON II FREEDOM CROSS (NORWAY)

Sq/Ldr. A. J. Goatly, R.A.F. (A Bty. 1930)

MILITARY MEDAL OF HONOUR (CZECHOSLOVAKIA)

Sq/Ldr. A. Walsham, R.A.F. (4 Coy. 1914)

CHEVALIER OF THE ORDER OF THE CROWN OF OAK (LUXEMBOURG)

Capt. R. D. Spence, H.A.C. Inf., att. Staff (2 Coy. 1928)

CROIX DE GUERRE (LUXEMBOURG)

Capt. R. D. Spence, H.A.C. Inf., att. Staff (2 Coy. 1928)

MILITARY CROSS (POLAND)

Major A. C. Maxwell, R.A. (A Bty. 1930)

MILITARY MEDAL FOR VALOUR (GREECE)

Capt. R. W. Harden, 27 Lancers (C Bty. 1939)

AIR FORCE CROSS (GREECE)

Sq/Ldr. F. P. Dawson, R.A.F. (4 Coy. 1932)

MEDAL OF HONOUR (REPUBLIC OF CHINA)

Capt. J. E. H. Wise, R.A. (D Bty. 1939)

MENTIONS IN DESPATCHES

391 Members of the Company were mentioned in Despatches for service in other units. Of these, 27 were twice mentioned and four received three mentions.

Appendix III

NOMINAL ROLL OF H.A.C. INFANTRY BATTALION ON CONVERSION TO O.C.T.U., 5 SEPTEMBER 1939

Units shewn against names are those into which the individual was first commissioned.

Rank subsequently attained, decorations received and unit with which the Officer subsequently served are shewn in brackets.

(Tr.) Transferred as an other rank. (k) Killed in action. (dw) Died of wounds. (d) Killed or died on active service. (w) Wounded. (m) Mentioned in despatches. (p) Prisoner of war.

Officers posted to 165 *O.C.T.U., Dunbar*

Lieut. B. L. Barber, H.A.C. Inf. (Major att. S. Stafford R., M.C.) (*w*)
Lieut. W. E. Cole, H.A.C. Inf. (Major att. S. Lan. R.)
2/Lieut. L. S. W. Cranfield, H.A.C. Inf. (Major Special Service Battalion) (*m*)
2/Lieut. H. F. A. Jackson, H.A.C. Inf., att. Sherwood Foresters, later Lt.-Col. M.B.E., T.D. (*m*)
Major A. D. McKechnie, H.A.C. Inf., att. Foresters (Lt.-Col. Buffs/Somerset L.I./Brig., D.S.O.)
Lieut. T. D. M. Parker, H.A.C. Inf. (Capt. att. Buffs)
Lieut. R. J. Rogers, H.A.C. Inf. (Capt. Worcs. Regt.)
2/Lieut. J. E. D. Travers, H.A.C. Inf. (Major att. Worcs. Regt.)

Officers posted to 162 *O.C.T.U., Bulford*

Major Hon. W. S. P. Alexander, D.S.O., Permanent Staff (Col. Irish Guards)
2/Lieut. J. E. Anderson, H.A.C. Inf. (Major, General Staff, M.B.E.)
2/Lieut. G. E. Beard, H.A.C. Inf. (Major The King's Regt. att. Iraq Levies)
Capt. C. M. F. Deakin, Permanent Staff (Major Grenadier Guards)
2/Lieut. L. D. Drysdale att. Devon Regt. (Major R.A.)
Lt.-Col. W. B. Farrar, M.C., H.A.C. Inf. att. E. Yorks
Capt. R. W. Gleed, H.A.C. Inf. (Major att. Gold Coast Regt. and 30 Royal Fusiliers)
2/Lieut. S. C. Holmes, H.A.C. Inf. (Major, General Staff)
2/Lieut. N. M. Johns, H.A.C. Inf. (Lt.-Col.)
Lieut. (Q.M.) A. J. Lake (Capt. (Q.M.) Royal Fusiliers) (*d*)
2/Lieut. R. M. V. Marchand, H.A.C. Inf. (Major att. Buffs)
O.R.S. (later Lieut. (Q.M.)) V. H. S. Martin (Major (Q.M.))
Lieut. D. Neill, H.A.C. Inf. (Major Recce. Corps, M.C.) (*w*)
Capt. D. P. O'Brien, H.A.C. Inf. (Major att. Indian Army)
Capt. R. H. Piper, H.A.C. Inf. (Major R.A.)
Lieut. R. D. Spence, H.A.C. Inf. (Capt., Staff) (Crown of Oak and Croix de Guerre, Luxembourg)
2/Lieut. J. S. Tolmie, H.A.C. Inf. (Capt. R.A.)
Capt. C. J. Wilson, H.A.C. Inf. (Major, General Staff), T.D.
Capt. Sir Terence E. P. Falkiner, BT., Permanent Staff (Lt.-Col., Coldstream Guards)

Lieut. H. P. Jameson, R.A.M.C. (Lt.-Col.)
Capt. W. G. Haughton (Major K.O.Y.L.I.) (*k*)
2/Lieut. N. Halfhead, H.A.C. Inf. (Major The Buffs)

Other Ranks posted to 162 *O.C.T.U., Bulford, as Cadets*

D. W. Abraham, (*Tr.*) R.F. (M.B.E.), C.S.M. 30 R. Fus.
D. C. Ackner, Wiltshire (Lieut. R.A.S.C.)
J. R. Acock, Somerset L.I. (Major) (*w*)
F. L. Agate, Manchester (Capt.)
C. M. Ainslie, (*Tr.*) E. Surrey (Cpl.)
R. H. Aitkin-Thompson, K.S.L.I. (Major R.E.)
R. F. Algie, R. Hampshire (Capt. att. K.A. Rif.) (*m*)
A. S. Allberry, K.O.Y.L.I. (Major M.C.)
P. J. Allen, Manchester (Capt. Queen's Regt.)
V. A. Allen, A. & S. Hrs. (Capt. R.A.)
D. R. S. Allward, Gordons (Lieut.) (*p*)
F. E. C. Apps, E. Lancashire (Capt.)
B. S. T. Archer, R.E. (Major, **G.C.**)
E. R. Archer, Q.O.R.W.K. (Lieut.)
M. J. F. Ashby, R. North'd. Fus. (Lieut. Recce. Corps) (*m*) (*p*)
M. A. Ashton, R. Norfolk (Capt., M.C.) (*p*)
R. E. Aske, E. Yorkshire (Capt.)
D. G. Asling, Middlesex (Capt.)
H. M. Backus, K.O.S.B. (Major) (*w*)
A. J. Baines, Essex (*k*)
J. G. P. Baker, R. Sigs. (Major)
J. H. Baker, Worc. R. (Major) (*w*)
P. G. Baker, R. Norfolk (Capt.) (*w*)
T. W. Balderston, Somerset L.I. (Major)
J. W. Balfour, K.O.S.B. (Lt.-Col. K.A. Rif.)
J. A. N. Balme, The Queen's (Capt. K.A. Rif.)
C. F. J. Barker, Wiltshire (Major, M.B.E.)
J. F. F. Barns, R. Berkshire (Major) (*m*)
G. S. Baxter, K.O.Y.L.I. (Capt.)
W. Baxter, K.O.Y.L.I. (Major)
J. R. Baynham, R. North'd. Fus. (Lieut. Recce. Corps) (*p*)
J. M. Beaven, Bedfs. Herts. (Capt.)
H. T. Beazley, D.W.R. (Major)
C. A. Beaufrere, R.A. (Lieut.)
D. A. Beckett, Essex (Lt.-Col. D.S.O.) (*w*)
H. C. Beddington, 24 Lancers (Capt.)
D. T. Beddous, R.W. Fus. (Major 15 Punjab)
V. W. J. Behrens, Wiltshire (Major)
G. G. E. Bennett, R. Lincolnshire (Capt.) (*w*)
W. H. Bennett, R. Fus. (Major M.B.E.) (*w*)
H. P. N. Benson, S. Staffordshire (Capt., M.C.) (*w*)
P. P. Benson, D.W.R. (Major, M.C.) (*k*)
A. V. B. Beresford, Y. and L. (Capt.)
E. J. Berlyn, R. Sussex (Lieut.) (*w*) (*p*)
F. M. Berridge, R. Lincoln. (Major R.E., I.A.)
R. A. Berriff, E. Yorks. (Capt. 2/7 Gurkha Rif.)
W. S. H. Betts, R. North'd. Fus. (Capt.)
D. D. Beveridge, Somerset L.I. (Capt.)
R. C. Bingham, R.E. (Major) (*k*)

H. E. Blakeney, Bedfs. Herts. (Capt. R.A.S.C.)
G. H. Blakey, Durham L.I. (*dw*)
C. C. Bluett, R.A.S.C. (Major)
G. R. Blurton, K.O.Y.L.I. (Capt.)
M. C. Bollon, Buffs (Capt.)
J. M. Bonell, R. Leicesters (Lieut.) (*k*)
D. C. Bonner, Wiltshire (Capt. R.A.S.C.)
T. W. Bonser, R. Fus. (Major att. Nigeria Regt., O.B.E.)
E. W. Booth, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
H. B. Booty, R. Sussex (Capt. Parachute Regt.)
C. A. Botibol, R. Leicesters (*dw*)
B. G. Bowler, Manchester (Lieut.)
J. H. Bowman, Green Howards (Lieut.)
R. A. Bowman, R. Norfolk (Lieut.)
D. H. Bowser, K.S.L.I. (Capt.)
A. J. Branney, R.A.S.C. (Major)
G. W. Brazier, K.R.R.C. (Major Intell. Corps, att. Chindits)
B. J. Brennan, Cameronians (Lt.-Col., M.C.) (*w*)
J. S. Brown, K.O.Y.L.I. (Major R.A.C.)
R. A. Brown, Lan. Fus. (Lieut.) (*p*)
S. J. L. Brown, (*Tr.*) R. Hampshire
P. A. C. K. Bruckmann, E. Surreys (Capt.)
K. R. L. Brunskill, E. Lan. R. (Major)
P. K. Bryceson, Cameronians (Major)
P. S. Buckingham, R. Norfolk (Capt. R.I.A.O.C.)
D. P. Buckney, Cheshire (Major)
D. S. S. Bullock, The Queen's (Capt.) (*k*)
J. C. Burrell, R. Lincolns (*dw*)
H. L. Burridge, R. Lincolns (*k*)
D. M. C. Burrough, R. Sussex (Capt. R.A.P.C.) (*p*)
N. R. Butterworth, The King's Regt. (Capt.) (*w*)
R. Byfield, R. Fus. (Major)
B. C. Cadel, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
N. F. Caie, R.A.S.C. (Lieut.) (*p*)
H. M. C. Candy, The Queen's (*k*)
A. J. Capps, Green Howards (*k*)
J. D. Carey, Welch (Major)
C. J. Carlé, E. Yorks. (Capt.)
O. D. Carman, I.A. (Lieut.)
L. T. Carmichael, Lan. Fus. (Major 5 Mahratta L.I.)
D. G. Carter-Clout, R.E. (Capt.)
M. A. Chamberlain, R. Lincolns (Major, M.B.E.)
J. C. Chandler, Cameronians (Major)
F. A. S. Chapman, Cameron Hrs. (Capt.) (*p*)
R. L. Charlesworth, Glosters (Lieut.) (*p*)
R. A. J. Cheffins, Middlesex (Capt., M.C.)
P. L. G. Child, Border (Major, M.B.E.)
J. H. Christensen, Glosters (Capt.) (*w*)
H. T. Churchman, Lan. Fus. (Lieut.) (*p*)
R. C. Clancy, Border (Capt.)
N. J. Clapham, Manchester (Capt.)
W. D. A. Clare, R.W. Fus. (Lt.-Col., M.B.E.) (*w*)
D. G. Clark, Wiltshire (Major, M.C.)
P. L. Clarke, Border (Capt.)

R. B. Clarke, R. Norfolk (Major R.I.A.S.C.)
R. B. Clayton, K.R.R.C. (Capt.) (*w*)
A. W. Cleverdon, Q.O.R.W.K. (Capt.) (*w*)
M. Y. Cobb, King's Own (Major R.A., M.B.E.)
J. G. Cohen, Welch (Major Recce. Corps)
G. D. Cole, R. Lincolns (Major K.A. Rif.)
G. E. Collett, Welch (Capt.)
L. A. Collins, R. Norfolk (Lieut.) (*w*)
E. P. P. Connellan, N. Staffs. (Capt.)
L. G. Constable, Welch (Capt.) (*p*)
W. H. Cooper, W. Yorks. (Capt.)
K. R. Cork, W. Yorks. (Lt.-Col. A.C.C.)
M. E. A. Costello, (*Tr.*) The Queen's
A. S. Court, Essex (Capt. Sherwood Foresters)
F. C. B. Covell, K.S.L.I. (Major)
B. B. Coward, R. Norfolk (Major)
G. G. Cowen, R. Warwick. (Lieut.) (*p*)
A. W. Cowper, W. Yorks. (Lt.-Col. Intell. Corps, O.B.E.)
A. J. Cox, R.W. Fus. (Capt.)
B. A. Cox, Bedfs. Herts. (Capt.)
H. D. Cox, R.A.S.C. (Lt.-Col.)
J. K. Cox, K.S.L.I. (Major att. Gold Coast Regt.)
A. A. Craddock, R.W. Fus. (Major)
J. H. Craig, Foresters (Major R.A.C.)
J. N. Crane, R.W. Fus. (Lieut.)
D. R. Crellin, Suffolks (Capt.)
C. J. Cresswell, R. Hampshire (Capt.) (*k*)
P. K. Crighton, K.S.L.I. (Major R.E.)
J. D. Cross, (*Tr.*) Q.O.R.W.K. (Cpl.)
R. G. Crossley, Border (Capt.)
R. A. Crump, (*Tr.*) R.E. (Sergt.)
R. W. Cudd, Lan. Fus. (Capt. Yorks Hrs., R.A.C.)
G. W. H. Culverhouse, Wilts. (Capt.)
M. Curran, D.W. Regt. (Major)
G. C. Daisley, Green Howards (Capt.)
E. J. Daniell, Manchester (Major 7 Rajput Regt.) (*m*)
D. M. Davidson, S.Wales Bord. att. Commandos (Capt., M.C.) (*dw*)
B. D. Davies, W. Yorks. (Major Staff)
J. E. Davies, Welch (Lieut.)
C. H. Dawson, R. North'd. Fus. (Lieut. Recce. Corps) (*w*) (*p*)
F. de Rome Dawson, K.R.R.C. (Major Q.O. Yorks. Dragoons) (*k*)
J. C. Dawson, Dorset (Capt.) (*p*)
P. Daykin, Middlesex (Capt. N.W. Frontier Regt. I.A.)
R. T. F. Daykin, R. Norfolk (Lieut.) (*p*)
P. A. Deane, Somerset L.I. (Lieut.)
W. Deller, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
E. M. D. Denny, Grenadier Guards (Capt.)
J. D. de Rusett, Loyals (Lieut. Recce. Corps)
K. P. Dexter, K.O.Y.L.I. (Major)
L. W. Dickerson, Manchester (Capt. R.E.)
V. Dover, Q.O.R.W.K. (Major Parachute Regt., M.C.)
G. O. L. Doyle, R.E.M.E. (Capt.)
A. M. Doyle-Davidson, Lan. Fus. (Capt.) (*k*)
A. M. Drummond, Gordon Hrs. (Lieut.) (*p*)

R. H. Dubois, Devon (Major)
E. R. Duce, R. Warwick (Lieut. R. Sigs.)
R. A. Duce, N. Staffords. (P/Offr. R.A.F.) (*d*)
H. R. G. Duckham, Cameronians (Capt. R. E.)
J. W. Duncombe, R. Lincolns. (Lt.-Col. R.I.A.S.C.)
I. F. R. Dunkley, E. Yorks. (Lieut.) (*p*)
D. A. Dutton, S.W.B. and Commandos (Lieut.) (*dw*)
D. F. Easten, Q.O.R.W.K. (Major, M.C.) (*m*)
D. M. S. Ebben, S.W.B. (Capt.) (*p*)
J. N. Ebbutt, R. Lincolns. (Capt., (*w*)
E. A. Ede, D.L.I. (Lieut.) (*p*)
E. J. Edwards, Q.O.R.W.K. (Major Parachute Regt.) (*p*)
W. Elliott, R.A.S.C. (Lieut.)
A. T. Elsom, E. Yorks. (Major 8 Punjab Regt., M.C.)
G. A. Elvidge, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
R. D. M. Emmerson, Cameron Hrs. (Capt.) (*k*)
R. W. English, E. Surreys (Major)
D. H. Evans, Worc. R. (Capt.)
E. B. Every, R. Ir. Fus. (Capt.)
R. J. T. Ewin, King's Own (Lieut.) (*dw*)
J. I. Faircloth, Cameronians (Major Recce. Corps)
T. D. Fairhead, R. North'd. Fus. (Lieut.) (*p*)
E. C. Farley, R.A.S.C. (Major)
A. F. Farwell, S.W.B. (Capt. R.A.)
R. W. Fidgeon, K.S.L.I. (Capt.)
B. V. Finnis, A. & S. Hrs. (Lieut. R.A.)
P. C. Fleming, Seaforth Hrs. (*dw*)
G. R. E. Follett, Dorset (*d*)
S. C. Fordham, R. Sussex (Capt. Recce. Corps) (*d*)
G. C. Fox, R. Berks. (Capt.) (*m*)
C. N. Freeman, (*Tr.*) R. Fus. (R.S.M. 30 R. Fus.)
P. J. Fuller, West Yorks. (Capt.)
G. S. Furtado, R.A.S.C. (Major)
M. A. Gammidge, R. Warwick (*k*)
E. C. Garton, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
G. L. Gay, D.L.I. (Capt.)
D. W. Gaylard, R. Sussex (Capt., M.C.) (*k*)
J. L. Gebhard, R. Warwick. (Major, M.C.)
G. C. George, R. Lincolns. (Lieut.) (*dw*)
M. Gibson, The King's (Major)
R. W. C. Giddings-Green, R.A.S.C. (Capt.) (*p*)
E. M. Gilbert, A. & S. Hrs. (Capt. R.A.)
G. H. Gilbey, D.W.R. (Capt.)
J. H. P. Gilbey, D.W.R. (Capt.)
R. H. Gill, K.S.L.I. (Lt.-Col.)
E. P. Gladwin, Beds. and Herts. (Capt. R.E.)
L. H. Glanville, Devon (Capt. R.E.)
R. Goddard, R.A.P.C. (Capt.)
G. E. Goodhew, R.A.S.C. (Capt. Gen. List) (*w*)
E. M. Goodman Smith, D.W.R. (Capt.)
R. J. Gowlland, Devon (Capt.)
T. A. Graham, D.L.I. (*k*)
D. M. Grant, K.O.S.B. (Capt.)
P. A. Grant, K.O.S.B. (Capt.)

L. G. W. Green, Northamptons (Major S. Staffs.)
P. M. Green, Devon (F/Lieut. R.A.F.)
P. R. Gresham, R.W. Fus. (Major att. K.A.R.)
E. J. L. Griffith, N. Staffs. (Major R.I.A.S.C.)
J. W. Griffith, N. Staffs. (Major)
S. T. J. Grimm
A. K. Guest, R. Hamps. (Major, M.C.)
W. R. Gwillim, S.W.B. (Capt.) (*k*)
D. S. Haigh, R.A.S.C. (Capt.) (*d*)
A. O. Hall, R. Hamps. R. (Major) (*w*)
N. L. Hall, Lan. Fus. (Major, M.B.E.)
C. H. N. Hamilton-Miller, Border (Capt.)
E. L. C. Harding, D.C.L.I. (Major, O. Orange Nassau (Netherlands))
M. M. Harding, K.S.L.I. (Lieut.)
D. E. B. Harris, Dorset (Capt.)
J. M. G. Harris, Somerset L.I. (Capt.)
R. E. Harris, Dorset (Major) (*k*)
H. W. P. Harrison, R.S. Fus. (Major, M.C.) (*w*)
S. K. Hart, R. Warwick (Major Parachute Regt.)
D. T. Hartog, K.R.R.C. (Capt.)
W. R. H. Hay, Lan. Fus. (Capt.)
A. M. Hedley, R. Ulster Rif. (Major) (*w*)
K. E. J. Henderson, Suffolk (Major) (*w*) (*m*)
D. A. Hewat, Lan. Fus. (Major, M.B.E.)
J. P. Hewetson, The King's (Major)
D. M. Hill, N. Staffs. (Capt.) (*w*)
W. H. Hodder, Essex (Major)
R. F. Hodsoll, The Queen's (Capt. Recce. Corps)
J. S. Hogan, Y. & L. (Lieut. 18 R. Garwhal Rif.) (*d*)
A. J. Hoghton, The Queen's (Capt.)
T. A. Holdsworth, Devon (Major)
M. H. Holme, R. Berks. (*k*)
R. Holmes, Welch (Major)
E. S. Hopkins, Green Howards (Lieut.) (*p*)
T. E. Hulbert
L. C. Hunter, Foresters (Major) (*k*)
R. D. Hunter, King's Own Regt. (Major R.A.; M.C.)
E. Hyde, R. Fus. (Major)
J. W. Hyde, R.U. Rif. (Major) (*w*)
D. H. Jackson, Bedfs. Herts. (Lieut.) (*k*)
G. S. Jacobs, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
J. H. Jacobs, (*Tr.*) E. Surreys
C. R. Janvrin, R. Berks (Major, M.B.E.)
H. D. Jay, R.A.S.C. (Major, M.B.E.)
J. G. Jenkins, W. Guards (Capt.)
J. H. Joel, Green Howards (Lieut.) (*p*)
J. H. Johnson, E. Surreys (Capt.) (*w*) (*p*)
R. L. Johnson, Middlesex (Capt. R.A.)
A. C. D. Jones, R.W. Fus. (Major)
A. W. Jones, (*Tr.*) The Queen's (S/Condr. W.O.I.)
J. P. Kaye, Essex (Capt.) (*w*)
P. D. Kebbell, Gordon Hrs. (Capt. att N. Rhodesia Regt.) (*d*)
A. L. Keen, K.S.L.I. (Capt.) (*w*)
P. J. Keen, R. Fus. (Major)

J. W. Kennedy, Cameronians (Capt.)
D. Kent, (*Tr.*) The Queen's
W. W. Kerr, R.U. Rif. (Major R.E.)
B. O. Kesby, Bedfs. Herts. (Capt.) (*k*)
J. H. Kidner, Wilts. (Lieut. Sp. A. Service Regt.) (*w*)
N. L. Kind, Y. & L. (Major 1/3 Q.A.O. Gurkha Rf., M.C.) (*w*) (*m*)
G. R. Kirkby, R. Berks. (Capt.)
A. V. L. Knight, Wilts. (Major)
P. C. Knight, S. Staffords. (Major)
R. E. Knight, R. Lincolns. (F/Lieut. R.A.F., D.F.C.)
C. T. Korts, R.S. Fus. (Major) (*k*)
D. R. Kyte, R.A.S.C. (Major Y. & Lancs.)
D. G. Lahey-Bean, Manchester (Major, M.C.)
J. C. Laing, E. Yorks. (Lt.-Col., O.B.E.)
E. S. Lamond, Seaforth Hrs. (Lieut.) (*p*)
R. G. Lance, Lan. Fus. (Capt. R.E.)
B. J. Lang, (*Tr*). E. Surreys (Sergt.)
E. P. J. Langley, Camerons (Lieut.)
J. M. Langley, Glosters (Capt. Glider Pilot Regt.)
R. D. E. Laurence, Devon (Capt. R.A.)
B. Lea, Glosters (Capt.)
J. Leaning, R.E. (Major)
L. G. Leatham, Middlesex (R.A.F.)
K. G. Leigh, Worc. R. (*p*)
G. E. Lewis, R.E. (att. Commandos)
D. O. Liddell, Cameronians (Major, M.C.) (*w*)
J. D. Lidstone, S. Lan. R. (Major)
R. A. L. Lightbody, N. Staffs. (Capt.)
E. E. T. G. Lindsay, S. Stafford. (Capt.)
G. S. G. Ling, Bedfs. Herts. (Lieut.)
E. P. Locatelli, D.W.R. (Lieut.) (*k*)
R. H. B. Lord, K.O.Y.L.I. (Major R.E., M.B.E., M.C.)
R. H. Lynch, Dorset (Major R.I.A.S.C.)
P. T. Lyver, Bedfs. Herts. (Major)
H. A. F. F. McGrath, R.S. Fus. (*k*)
J. McGregor-Cheers, I.A. (Major 8 Punjab Regt.)
E. D. Macintosh, D.W.R. (Capt.)
J. G. McIntosh, R.S. Fus. (Capt.)
D. C. McKechnie, (*Tr.*) E. Surreys (*p*)
E. N. Mackenzie, D.W.R. (Lieut.) (*w*)
H. F. S. Mackenzie, Seaforth Hrs. (Lieut.) (*p*) (*killed while escaping*)
D. T. Maclaren, Suffolk (Capt.) (*w*)
J. E. H. McNaughton, I.A. (Capt. R.I.A.O.C.)
M. H. McQueen, Bedfs. Herts. (Lieut.)
F. S. Manford, D.L.I. (Major) (*d*)
G. P. W. Mann, Surreys (Major)
R. V. Marquis, Cameron Hrs. (Capt.)
R. V. Marriott, R.A.S.C. (Lt.-Col.)
D. A. Marshall, Lan. Fus. (Major) (*m*)
T. McL. Marshall, Green Howards (Lieut.)
S. J. Masters, Suffolk (Lieut.) (*p*)
E. G. Mathews, R.A.O.C. (Major) (*m*)
A. Mathieson, Suffolk (Major)
A. C. Maughan, E. Surreys (Capt.)

D. G. May, The Queen's (Capt.)
L. T. Mead, Q.O.R.W.K. (Capt. att. Gurkha Rif.) (*k*)
A. W. Meldrum, Glosters (Lieut.) (*w*)
P. C. Messer, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
G. Milroy, Cameron Hrs. (Capt.)
J. M. Moir, Seaforth Hrs. (Capt.) (*w*) (*p*)
D. R. T. Mole, Bedfs. Herts. (Major)
F. E. B. Mole, N. Staffs. (Lieut.)
A. L. W. Moore, Foresters (Major) (*m*)
A. K. Morgan, D.W.R. (Major att. Sierra Leone Regt.)
D. G. Morgan, (*Tr.*) R.A.M.C. (Sergt.)
R. W. Morgan, K.S.L.I. (*d*)
J. Morris, Glosters (Major)
J. S. Morrison-Jones, Welch (Lt.-Col., M.C.) (*k*)
K. H. Mostyn, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
N. F. Mostyn, N. Staffs. (Major)
R. A. B. Mould, R. Leicesters (Major)
E. L. G. Myer, (*Tr.*) R.E.M.E.
G. L. G. Napier, (*Tr.*) Middlesex
D. J. Neilson, R. Fus. (Capt.)
E. E. Newbald, Q.O.R.W.K. (Capt., M.C.) (*p*)
D. Nicholson, Essex (Capt. I.A.)
D. T. H. Nicholson, Border (Capt., M.B.E.)
K. McA. Nicholson, Essex (Capt. 16 Punjab Regt.)
R. C. Nightingale, Devon (Major R.A.) (*k*)
T. P. B. Nimmo, Cameron Hrs. (Major Gordons) (*m*)
H. U. L. Norfolk, Buffs (Lieut.)
A. V. North, R. Leicesters (Lieut. att. K.A.R.)
J. M. North, Manchester (Major) (*dw*)
E. H. Notson, R.A.S.C. (Capt.) (*m*) (*k*)
J. P. H. Nye, (*Tr.*) Buffs (Cpl.) (*p*)
D. P. Oexle, Essex (Capt.)
J. A. O'R. O'Flynn (Capt. R.U.R. att. 4 Gurkha Rif.) (*d*)
B. W. Ogden Smith, (*Tr.*) E. Surreys and Commandos (Sergt., D.C.M., M.M.)
W. H. Ogden Smith, Foresters (Capt. Green Howards) (*p*)
J. D. P. O'Leary, S.W.B. (Major)
K. H. Orchard, R.W. Fus. (Major) (*w*)
J. Ormiston, E. Yorks. (Major) (*m*)
T. C. Osborn, Cheshire (Capt. L. Irish Rif.) (*w*)
A. S. Page, R. Norfolk (Lieut.) (*p*)
H. A. C. Page, Middlesex (Major) (*w*)
R. W. Pannell, R.W. Fus. (Capt.)
D. H. Pantlin, K.S.L.I. (Major 9 Jat. Regt.)
D. P. Passmore, Northamptons (Lieut.) (*dw*)
R. H. H. Pawsey, Middlesex (F/Lieut. R.A.F.)
W. J. Paxman, Border (Capt.)
J. F. Pearcy, R. Hampshire (Capt. Recce. Corps, M.C.)
C. B. Peartree, D.L.I. (Capt.)
P. M. Peerless, Q.O.R.W.K. (Capt.) (*k*)
V. A. Pemberton, Northamptons (Lieut.) (*w*)
G. E. R. Pendred, Green Howards (Major) (*w*)
B. A. W. Penn, (*Tr.*) Q.O.R.W.K. (*k*)
D. H. Percy, Coldstream Guards (Capt.)
G. A. Perry, Essex (Capt.)

J. Perry, Northamptons (Lieut.) (*dw*)
T. W. Peters, K.S.L.I. (Major Hereford Regt. att. Commandos, M.B.E.)
A. Petty, Border (P/Offr. R.A.F.) (*k*)
W. M. C. Philip, A. & S. Hrs. (Major R.A.)
J. A. Philipp
A. H. Phillips, Foresters (Major) (*w*)
K. R. Phillips, K.S.L.I. (Capt. att. K.A.R.)
M. Phillips, R. Fus. (Capt. K.A.R.)
J. W. Pike, King's Own (Capt.)
C. G. Pile, E. Surrey (Lieut.)
L. H. Pillar, Somerset L.I. (Capt.)
K. N. Plater, E. Surreys (Capt.) (*w*)
R. E. Pockett, R.E. (Major)
J. G. Pollard, Devon (Major R.E.) (*m*)
L. W. Potts, R.A.O.C. (Capt.)
A. W. Powell, R.A.S.C. (Capt.)
I. S. Price, Gordon Hrs. (Capt., M.B.E.) (*p*)
J. L. Price, Merchant Navy (2nd Radio Officer) (*k*)
J. M. Prichard, (*Tr.*) The Queen's (Sergt.) (*w*)
E. C. O. Prickett, Green Howards (Lieut. R.A.C.)
D. R. Prince, D.L.I. (Lieut.) (*dw*)
M. T. D. Quin, R. Berks. (Major Recce. Corps)
H. C. Quitman, R.A.S.C. (Major)
G. L. Randall, D.C.L.I. (Capt.)
J. A. Randall, D.W.R. (Major) (*w*) (*m*)
P. E. Raw, Somerset L.I. (F/Lieut. R.A.F., D.F.C.) (*k*)
J. E. Ray, R.S. Fus. (Major)
F. E. Rayner, R.S. Fus. (Capt. att. 2 Polish Corps) (*m*)
E. T. C. Reed, R.W. Fus. (Major K.A.R.)
P. R. Reeve, (*Tr.*) R.A.S.C. (Sergt.)
L. H. Renton, The Queen's (Lieut.) (*p*)
R. W. Reynolds, D.C.L.I. (Major)
R. P. Rhodes, Middlesex (Capt.) (*w*)
H. M. Rimmer, Northamptons (Major R.E.)
F. S. Ripper, R.S. Fus. (Capt.) (*k*)
B. A. Ritchie, A. & S. Hrs. (Capt.)
G. E. Robers-Medway, Bedfs. Herts (*k*)
A. G. L. Roberts, K.S.L.I. (Major, O. Orange Nassau (Netherlands))
E. F. C. Roberts, Northamptons (Major R.E.M.E.)
H. B. Robinson, Northamptons (Lieut.) (*p*)
T. E. A. Robinson, Essex (Major Parachute Regt.) (*m*)
The Hon. P. Rennell Rodd, R.N. (Lt.-Col. W. Gds.)
G. F. Rothwell, Bedfs. Herts. (Lieut.)
D. F. N. Rowlatt, Worcs. (Capt.)
D. Roy, Lan. Fus. (Major)
W. A. Russell, R. Scots (Major, M.C.)
H. P. Ryland, Devon (Capt.)
R. A. G. Sandford, Devon (25 Dragoons, R.A.C.; Eng/Lieut. R.I.N.V.R.)
J. I. N. C. Saunders, Suffolk (Capt.)
B. Savory, R. Norfolk (Major)
G. A. Scaramanga, K.S.L.I. (Capt. att Commandos, M.C.)
R. A. Scase, K.S.L.I. (Major K.A.R.)
C. H. Schofield, R. Berks (Major) (*w*)

G. T. Schofield, R.A.O.C. (Capt. R.A.S.C.)
J. A. G. Self, R.P.C. (Capt.)
R. A. G. Self, (*Tr.*) Essex (L/Cpl.)
N. J. Setten, Devon (Capt.) (*w*)
G. L. Sharples, (*Tr.*) E. Surreys (*k*)
R. T. Shaw, The Queen's (Lieut.) (*dw*)
G. R. E. L. Shears, E. Lan. R. (Major R.E.) (*w*)
N. E. Shearsmith, (*Tr.*) The Queen's (Sergt.) (*p*)
R. D. Shiell, Y. & L. (Major) (*m*)
H. J. T. Sills, D.W.R. (Major, M.C.)
A. G. Simon, Buffs (Capt.) (*m*)
A. I. F. Simpson, Manchester (Capt.)
D. K. Smith, E. Surreys (Lieut.) (*k*)
M. E. Smith, Manchester (Capt. Intell. Corps) (*p*)
H. G. Smith-Spark, Lan. Fus. (Capt. R.A.C.)
A. Speed-Andrews, K.O.Y.L.I. (Capt., U.S. Bronze Star)
A. R. Stacy, R. Norfolk (Major)
E. F. Stacy, R.E. (Lieut.) (*p*)
N. A. H. Stafford, Border (Capt.) (*w*)
L. G. Stancourt, R.W.K. (Capt.)
S. W. B. Steven, E. Lan. R. (Capt. att R. Lincolns)
H. F. Stevens, E. Yorks. (Capt.)
H. J. Stockings, E. Lan. R. (Capt., M.C.) (*w*)
W. E. C. Stockley, The Queen's (Capt. R.E.)
J. C. Stott, R. Fus. (Capt.)
L. D. S. Strachan, Oxf. Bucks. (Major) (*m*)
J. L. Stride, K.S.L.I. (Capt. att. Worcs.) (*k*)
E. J. Stringer, R.U. Rif. (Capt. Kumaon Rif.)
J. D. Symes, Devon (Capt.)
M. C. Symondson, R. Ir. Fus. (Capt.)
P. C. Symons
K. D. Tarr, Middlesex (*k*)
D. J. W. Taylor, R. Berks. (Lieut. R. Sigs., Capt. Parachute Regt.)
J. Terry, R.A.O.C. (Lt.-Col. R.E.M.E.)
E. F. Thompson, Middlesex (Major, M.C.)
C. H. Thorogood, E. Surreys (Major att. 5/9 Jats) (*m*)
G. W. Thrift, Green Howards (Capt. R. Sigs.)
M. O. Tinniswood, R. Hamps. (Capt.)
C. R. Toby, Foresters (Capt.) (*w*)
T. I. Todrick, K.O.S.B. (Capt.) (*m*)
R. H. Tomkins, H.A.C. Cadet Bn. (Capt.)
F. A. W. Tooby, R.A.S.C. (Capt.) (*w*)
T. W. Torring, N. Staffs. (Major R. Leicesters)
J. Tredinnick, R. Leicesters (Major 11 Sikh Regt.)
P. L. Triscott, S.W.B. (Lieut.) (*p*)
D. P. Turnage, D.C.L.I. (Lieut.) (*p*)
C. B. G. Turner, K.O.Y.L.I. (Capt. R.A.)
E. F. G. Turner, K.O.Y.L.I. (Major att. Somaliland Bn. K.A.R.)
J. R. Turner, Manchester (Major, O. Leopold II and C. de G. (Belgium))
S. G. Turner, (*Tr.*) E. Surreys (L/Cpl.) (*k*)
G. A. Tyer, K.O.Y.L.I. (Capt. R.A.S.C.)
T. H. Tyer, Middlesex (Lieut.)
H. A. Tyler, E. Surreys (Capt. Queen's)
B. A. Vandamm, (*Tr.*) R. Fus. (Sergt. R. Berks.)

J. M. Vaughan, S.W.B. (F/Offr. R.A.F.) (*k*)
I. B. Wakefield, Glosters (Major) (*w*) (*m*)
J. R. Walker, The Queen's (Major) (*m*) (*k*)
J. Ward, (*Tr.*) R.A.S.C. (L/Cpl.)
B. O. Warren, S. Lan. R. (*dw*)
I. O. Warren
F. H. Waters, R. Hamps. (Major, M.C.)
P. B. Watson, Green Howards (Capt., D.S.O.) (*p*)
C. G. Webber, Middlesex (Capt.) (*p*)
J. V. Webber, A. & S.H. (Lieut.) (*p*)
R. H. Webber, A. & S.H. (Lieut.)
D. S. Whineray
J. S. White, Green Howards (Capt.)
W. E. Wickes, Green Howards (Capt.) (*m*)
D. E. Widmer, R. Warwick. (*k*)
B. G. Widnell, Wilts. (Capt., M.C.) (*dw*)
G. A. K. Wilks, Oxf. Bucks. (Capt.) (*w*)
J. D. Willans, R.W.F. (Major) (*m*)
B. H. Williams, R. Hamps. (Major 6 Gurkha Rif.)
G. C. Williams, Welch (Capt.) (*k*)
P. J. Williams, R. Berks. (Capt.)
A. Wilson, H.L.I. (Capt.)
G. B. S. Wilson, Som. L.I. (Lieut.) (*d*)
K. R. Wilson, Buffs (Capt. 15 Punjab Regt.)
P. G. Wilson, R. Lincolns (P/Offr. R.A.F.) (*k*)
R. P. Wingate, The Queen's (Major)
F. F. Winmill, King's Own (Capt. att. Chindits) (*k*)
P. C. Winton, Gordon Hrs. (Major, M.C.) (*p*)
E. H. Wolfe, Bedfs. Herts. (Major)
G. D. Wood, E. Yorks. (Capt.) (*k*)
W. V. Woodward, R.A.S.C. (Lieut.) (*w*)
W. S. Workman, Manch. (Sierra Leone Regt., Major 11 Sikhs) (*w*)
D. B. Worley, R.A.S.C. (Major)
E. G. L. Wyke-Holloway, Devon (Capt.)
H. C. Yeatman, Oxf. Bucks. (Capt. K.A.R.)
D. V. Young, Y. & L. (Major, M.C.) (*w*)
E. T. Young, Y. & L. (Major)
P. M. D. Young, The King's (Capt.)
J. C. Zulver, R.A.C. (Lieut.)

APPENDIX IV

CITATIONS

The Victoria Cross

Major ROBERT HENRY CAIN

The Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, att. The South Staffordshire Regiment (1st Airborne Division) (No. 2 Company, 1928)

In Holland on 19 September 1944, Major Cain was commanding a rifle company of the South Staffordshire Regiment during the battle of Arnhem when his company was cut off from the rest of the battalion and during the next six days was closely engaged with enemy tanks, self-propelled guns and infantry. The Germans made repeated attempts to break into the company position by infiltration and had they succeeded in doing so the whole situation of the Airborne Troops would have been jeopardised.

Major Cain, by his outstanding devotion to duty and remarkable powers of leadership, was to a large extent personally responsible for saving a vital sector from falling into the hands of the enemy.

On 20 September a Tiger tank approached the area held by his company and Major Cain went out alone to deal with it armed with a Piat. Taking up a position he held his fire until the tank was only 20 yards away when he opened up. The tank immediately halted and turned its guns on him, shooting away a corner of the house near where this officer was lying. Although wounded by machine-gun bullets and falling masonry, Major Cain continued firing until he had scored several direct hits, immobilised the tank and supervised the bringing up of a 75-mm. howitzer which completely destroyed it. Only then would he consent to have his wounds dressed.

The next morning this officer drove off three more tanks by the fearless use of his Piat, on each occasion leaving cover and taking up position in open ground with complete disregard for his personal safety.

During the following days, Major Cain was everywhere where danger threatened, moving amongst his men and encouraging them by his fearless example to hold out. He refused rest and medical attention in spite of the fact that his hearing had been seriously impaired because of a perforated eardrum and he was suffering from multiple wounds.

On 25 September the enemy made a concerted attack on Major Cain's position, using self-propelled guns, flame throwers and infantry. By this time the last Piat had been put out of action and Major Cain was armed with only a light 2-in. mortar. However, by a skilful use of this weapon and his daring leadership of the few men still under his command, he completely demoralised the enemy who, after an engagement lasting more than three hours, withdrew in disorder.

Throughout the whole course of the Battle of Arnhem, Major Cain showed superb gallantry. His powers of endurance and leadership were the admiration of all his fellow-officers and stories of his valour were being constantly exchanged amongst troops. His coolness and courage under incessant fire could not be surpassed.

Major Cain's award is not only enshrined in the Company's annals. It has another enduring memorial in his old school, King William's College, Isle of Man. When his V.C. was announced, the directors of Shell Petroleum Company Limited, and his colleagues on their staff, opened a fund to which more than 3000 of them contributed, and which reached a total of £1500. It was devoted, at his wish, to the foundation of a scholarship at the School.

The George Cross

Major B. S. T. ARCHER

Royal Engineers (No. 4 Company, 1939)

The King has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the George Cross in recognition of most conspicuous gallantry in carrying out hazardous work in a very brave manner to

Second-Lieutenant (acting Lieutenant) Bertram Stuart Trevelyan Archer (126305), Corps of Royal Engineers.

(*London Gazette*, 30 *September* 1941)

GLOSSARY

A.A.—Anti-aircraft.

A.C.V.—Armoured Command Vehicle.

AIR O.P.—Spotting aircraft flown by Royal Artillery Observation Officer or R.A.F. pilot.

ANVIL.—Code for the invasion of Southern France. Later changed to DRAGOON.

ARK.—Mobile bridge carried by a Churchill tank.

A./T.—Anti-tank.

AVALANCHE.—Code for the landing at Salerno.

A.V.R.E.—Assault Vehicle Royal Engineers.

BATTLEAXE.—Code for General Wavell's attack in the Western Desert, March 1941. See page 23.

BAYTOWN.—Code for invasion of the Italian mainland opposite Messina by 8 Army.

BAZOOKA.—German infantry anti-tank weapon (PANZERFAUST).

B.C.—Battery Commander.

BESA.—Copy of a Czech air-cooled machine-gun from which the British Bren had also been copied. Made also in a heavier pattern with 15-mm. bullet.

BIR.—Water cistern or well.

BLUECOAT.—Code for 11 Division's attack south of Caumont, 30 July 1944.

BOFORS.—Light anti-aircraft gun.

BOX.—Strong point with wired and mined protection zone.

BREWING.—The making of tea, but applied metaphorically to a tank or vehicle which has been set on fire.

BUFFALO.—Armoured amphibious troop-carrying vehicle.

CHURCHILL.—Infantry tank with heavy (6-in.) armour largely proof against 50-mm. gun. It therefore replaced the MATILDA. Armed with a 6-pounder gun. A good many were lost at Dieppe —and all their secrets.

COVENANTER.—Mark V Cruiser tank. Under-powered, with a bad system of cooling, but a low silhouette. Replaced quickly by the CRUSADER.

C.P.O.—Command Post Officer.

CRAB.—Sherman tank fitted with an axle in front, round which chains swung as it progressed, to detonate mines. Worked well, but slow, and the chains soon wore out. Known also as the DU TOIT, FLAIL or SCORPION.

CRACKERJACK BOMBS.—Bags containing about 100 hand-grenades of different fuze-lengths; dropped by German aircraft.

CROCODILE.—Flame-throwing tank.

CROMWELL.—Adaptation of the CRUISER tank, with Rolls-Royce water-cooled aircraft engine. Carried a 6-pounder or 75-mm. gun and a machine-gun in its main turret. Cruising speed 40 m.p.h.

CRUISER.—Close support tank with 3-in. howitzer. Later developed into the CROMWELL. It gave constant trouble with its fan drive and water pump.

CRUSADER.—Mark VI Cruiser. Fast and comfortable, with a cruising range of 100 miles; but its high speed was not matched by its reliability. Its 2-pounder gun was inefficient in range and hitting power.

CRUSADER.—Code for 8 Army's first thrust to Agheila.

DINGO.—Small Daimler scout car issued in January 1942.

D.R.—Despatch Rider.

DRAGOON.—See ANVIL.

DU TOIT.—See CRAB.

ECHELON.—Unit's supply, ammunition and petrol vehicles connecting daily, in two stages, with the supply line to base.

FLAIL.—See CRAB.

F.O.O.—Forward Observation Officer. Artillery officer, linked with the guns, calling for fire as required by the front line unit to which he is attached.

GOODWOOD.—Code for General Montgomery's thrust to the east of Caen, July 1944.

G.P.O.—Gun Position Officer.

GRANT.—American tank, developed from the LEE. Too slow for reconnaissance. Hence the use of the CRUSADER or STUART. Original pattern had a small arc of traverse for its 75-mm. field gun. Modified to provide an all-round traverse and with a high-velocity 75-mm. gun, it became a SHERMAN.

GROUSERS.—Extensions to tank tracks, fitted to the existing tracks to give greater width and so better purchase. Very dangerous they were at night, to people accustomed to a tank being only "so" wide.

H HOUR.—Hour at which an operation is to begin.

HALF-TRACKS.—Vehicles with front wheels and rear tracks.

HANDSHAKE.—One of many code words for "form Close Leaguer".

HARBOUR.—The protective formation for rest and maintenance, adopted by a unit or group in Italy or Europe, using whatever cover was available against air observation. See also LEAGUER.

HAWKINS GRENADE.—Small and not very efficient anti-personnel or anti-vehicle grenades intended for use as impromptu mines.

HONEY.—American GENERAL STUART light tank, armed with 37-mm. gun. Most reliable.

HOUSIE HOUSIE.—Mild gambling game, a species of tombola, which flourishes rather noisily in barrackrooms, often in spite of standing orders forbidding it. Troopship organisers of " Housie " schools were, however, "licensed".

HUSKY.—Code word for the invasion of Sicily.

JEBEL.—Mountain.

JOCK COLUMN.—Introduced September-December 1940. Named after Lieut.-Colonel (later Major-General, V.C.) J. C. Campbell, 4 R.H.A. Small column of all arms : armoured cars for reconnaissance, 25-pounders for hitting, infantry company for protection of guns and night work. Quickly established a moral superiority over the Italians.

JUNO.—Courseulles Beach, Normandy.

KANGAROO.—Armoured troop carrier.

L.C.T.—Landing Craft, Tanks.

LEAGUER.—The defensive formation adopted by a unit or group in the Desert for rest and maintenance. Open and Closed Leaguer are described on page 7. See also HARBOUR.

L.S.T.—Landing Ship, Tanks.

MARKET.—Airborne operation against Arnhem and Nijmegen. With its complement, the landborne operation, it constituted MARKET GARDEN.

MIKE.—Code prefix to a call for the fire of the entire guns of a Regiment. See also UNCLE, VICTOR.

Mn.—*Maaten*. A well.

M.T.B.—Motor Torpedo Boat.

MULBERRY.—Artificial harbour for Normandy invasion.

NINER.—Code for General.

O. GROUP.—Any group of officers and/or men gathered to receive orders.

O.P.—Observation Post.

OVERLORD.—Code for Normandy invasion. Formerly ROUND-UP.

PANZER.—Tank (German for "armour").

P.I.A.T.—Projector Infantry Anti-Tank (cf. BAZOOKA).

PLUNDER.—Code for crossing of the Rhine north of the Ruhr.

PRIEST.—Self-propelled 105-mm. gun-howitzer on a GRANT chassis, issued to 11 Regiment before El Alamein and to 12 Regiment after Tunis.

QUAD.—Four-wheel-drive gun-towing vehicle.

R.B.—Rifle Brigade.

REGIMENTAL FIRE!—It is the custom of the H.A.C., on occasions that would ordinarily call for "Three cheers!" to give their own Regimental Fire. This compliment is paid to members only—including, of course, the Captain General and such of the Royal Family as happen to be members of the Company.

On the command "Regimental Fire—Ready—Present" each member raises his forearm, bent, the hand closed, and, uttering the sound, "Zaye!" at each motion, waves his hand to and fro across his face. At the ninth "Zaye!" he jerks his hand upwards and outwards and opens it.

There is a curious deviation when the toast of "The Visitors" is honoured—if, as is usually the case, the guests include non-members. The proposer calls for "Silent Fire". The first eight-arm movements are made in silence, and a loud "Zaye!" is only given at the ninth.

Much unnecessary mystery has been made of the origin of this custom, but it has an obvious connection with the moment in action when infantry soldiers of the 17th and 18th centuries "liberally tossed their hand granados". This evolution formed part of a stirring mock siege, a feature of one of the Company's "General Days" in 1665, as described in the Domestic Series of State Papers (Charles II). J. Blackwell, Clerk and Adjutant to the H.A.C., gives the drill in detail in his "Compendium of Military Discipline" (1729): "Handle your matches, open your fuze (i.e. with the teeth) guard your fuze, blow your match, *fire and throw your grenade*".

The waving of the grenade to and fro till the fuze was well alight, and the final throwing, with their appropriate noises, could hardly be better represented than in the Regiment's traditional greeting to those whom they desire to honour.

RHINOCEROS.—Hedge-cutting device fitted to tanks. See page 270.

RHINO FERRIES.—Self-propelled rafts for ferrying vehicles ashore from landing ships, etc., in the Normandy invasion.

ROMMEL'S ASPARAGUS.—Stakes with which the Germans studded the Normandy invasion beaches. See pages 270 and 311.

ROUND-UP.—See OVERLORD.

R.T.R.—Royal Tank Regiment.

SCORPION.—See CRAB.

SEXTON.—British self-propelled 25-pounder. Issued to 11 Regiment in May 1944 and to 12 Regiment in November of that year. 13 Regiment were also armed with these.

SHERMAN.—Tank developed from the GRANT, with new type of turret incorporating British ideas. Rather low speed, so armoured cavalry used (when available) one squadron of the faster CRUSADERS with two squadrons of GRANTS or SHERMANS. Could not "skid steer", i.e. turn on its own axis; a great disadvantage on European roads.

SHINGLE.—Code for the landing at ANZIO.

S.P.—Self-propelled.

SPLASH.—When bullets strike a tank the resulting heat melts the lead, which squirts into the tank through the smallest apertures. Responsible for a good many flesh wounds.

STONK.—Strictly, the official abbreviation for "Standard linear concentration of gunfire". Used loosely for any concentration of shell fire—especially if the user is at the receiving end.

STUART.—See Honey.

SUNSHADE.—Camouflage structure which, mounted at the last minute on a tank, makes it resemble, when seen from the air, a lorry.

SUPERCHARGE.—General Montgomery's second attack at El Alamein.

SWORD.—Douvres beach, Normandy.

TELLER MINE.—German anti-tank mine.

TIGER.—German Mark VI tank with long high-velocity 75-mm. gun and heavy armour. See page 125.

TITANICA.—Indian-made, four-wheeled armoured scout car. When the G.O.C. 1 Armoured Division first saw them he also saw "Darkie" Matthews of B Battery operating one, and said within that worthy's hearing: "Oh, I didn't know they supplied driver-operators as well". Darkie, being a Cockney born and bred, received this intelligent comment with the sourest of looks, and the wireless set crackled for the rest of the day.

TOFFEE APPLE.—Radio-telephone appeal for direction. See page 8.

TORCH.—Code for the invasion of North Africa.

TRIGH.—Desert road or track.

UNCLE.—Code prefix to a call for the fire of the entire divisional artillery. See also MIKE, VICTOR.

VALENTINE.—Cheap medium tank evolved from 1932 pattern, with thicker armour. Hybrid between a Cruiser and an infantry tank. Reliable but slow.

VARSITY.—Code for Allied Airborne Army operations north and north-west of Wesel.

VERITABLE.—1 Canadian Army's operation south-eastwards between the Meuse and the Rhine.

VICTOR.—Code prefix to a call for the fire of the whole Corps artillery. See also MIKE, UNCLE.

V.I.P.—Very Important Person. VV.I.P. More so.

WADI.—Desert valley, dry in summer, a watercourse in winter. In Tunisia spelt Oued.

WHITE.—Scout car, half-track.

WILLIAM – Code prefix to a call for the fire of the whole Army Artillery.

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Knightsbridge · El Alamein · El Hamma
Sbiba · Thala · Tunis
North Africa 1941-1943

Sicily 1943 · Cassino II · Coriano · Senio
Italy 1944-1945